SHORT STORIES

No. 791. Week Ending February 27, 1904. Price One Penny.

"SIGN THAT PAPER IF YOU DARE!" SHE CRIED.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "Turning the Tables." See inside.)

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Short Stories

No. 791.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending February 27th, 1904.

Turning the Tables.

A Story of Love and Gratitude.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

Walter Heaton surveyed the portrait on the wall with a queer smile.

"My father used to tell me that there is always a way of getting what you want if you have the will! 'Where there's a will there's a way!' I pride myself on having studied his advice, and I'll undertake to say that I can get most things that I set my heart on. Now, let us see! I've made up my mind to be rich, and also that I am going to marry Lena Brookes. I think that both desires are on the high road to realisation; in fact, I shall put the latter to the test to-morrow, and I'm sure of winning. Yet the task in both cases has offered considerable difficulty!"

He puffed away contentedly at his cigar. At the end of a few seconds he resumed his half-audible monologue.

"I first determined to be rich, and, as at that time I had no fancy for marriage, I did not set about making a fortune by the unintelligent method of trying to captivate some rich widow or silly girl. I am succeeding well in my own direction. What that direction is, I don't tell! A wise man keeps his own style of fortune-making secret. The least said about that, the safer! And the wife? Ah!"

It was a long-drawn exclamation, which told of anxiety to possess.

"That girl would not have married me in ordinary circumstances. It isn't flattering to me, I'll admit, but that's the fact!" So ran Heaton's thoughts. "She is not beautiful, only just pretty, but with a smile and an expression in the liquid eyes that takes the soul out of a man from the very moment he sets eyes on her. At least, that's the way she affected me. I was in love with her from the first moment, and I said that if my eminently respectable parent was correct, I could have her for my wife if I wanted her. I did want her, I do want her! By all that's good, I mean to have her!

"It didn't take me long to see that she would not take to me in the ordinary course of things, so stratagem had to be resorted to. And I hit upon a very pretty little plan, which worked like magic!

"She was skating. I knew that she would be at it in good time, and I prepared things accordingly!" A curious light came in his eyes at this instant. "I kept close behind her, and she got cross, so she scudded away and I followed, without appearing to notice her! Oh, I worked the oracle so that she could suspect nothing! And all at once something happened! Isn't it strange how accidents happen, now? She went over, just at a *particular* spot! That accident couldn't have happened at a worse spot, even if the thing had been *planned!*

"Before she realised it, she had gone through the ice. Of course, I was just in time to save her. I got her out before she had been fairly in. I had saved her life, so I managed to insinuate in a very innocent way; and, naturally, she was compelled to be grateful! She couldn't help herself!

"After that I took good care that I should reap the full benefit of this affair. I pressed my suit upon her gradually, and she couldn't tell me to get out. I contrived to keep that life-saving business just enough in the foreground to make her feel that she must receive my attentions, and all the while I appeared as if I wasn't thinking of that, but was taking it for granted that she liked me for myself alone! And I've got her so tight in the meshes now, that I don't see how she can get out! Will she be happy with me? Why not? It will be her fault if she isn't, and all I have to consider is that I shall be happy with her!"

An uneasy thought crossed his mind at that moment. Was there anyone else in the background? Certain indications suggested an affirmative reply, and he did not like that.

"Then it is someone of whom her father does not, or would not, approve, so I think there is not much chance for him. On the other hand, she might take it into her dainty head that she preferred to remain single if she could not have him. That's where my hold comes in. I'll force her, out of sheer gratitude, to marry me!"

Walter Heaton ought to have been contented with his prospects, considering that he was so sure of his ultimate success, but he was not pleased. Something had disturbed him, so he strode from the apartment and put on his hat and overcoat.

A minute later he was striding along the almost empty street in the darkness. The air was cold, and the wind keen; he felt a certain exhilaration as he walked rapidly along. The fresh air was dispelling the troubled thoughts and cooling the heated brain. Lena Brookes would marry him; she *must*. He could win her father's consent; the old man was wealthy, and would not tolerate a poor son-in-law. Walter Heaton could prove that he was well provided with this world's goods, and likely to have a still larger share in the future. And there might be some other power of persuasion; it might be possible to find out that old Brookes was involved in some-

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thing or the other, and it was not beyond the range of possibility to get him involved if he were not so already!

He had arrived at this stage when he pulled himself up short, just in time to prevent himself from stumbling on two people as he turned the corner. They were going in the same direction as himself, which helped him to avert a collision; they must have crossed from the opposite corner just before he reached it with his long strides. He was turning aside in order to pass them, when the voice of Lena Brookes fell upon his ear with astounding suddenness. She was addressing her companion, a man.

"I wish I could take as rosy a view of matters as you do, Harold!" she said with a sigh. "Papa will not consent to our marriage, I know quite well! And how can I get rid of Mr. Heaton? He saved my life, and it would be the basest ingratitude to treat him so coldly!"

"I know that you are distressed, Lena, dear," returned the young man, his voice so full of infinite tenderness that Heaton set his teeth hard and stifled an oath. "But you will never entertain any offer of marriage from this Mr. Heaton, will you?"

Heaton waited with bated breath for the answer; it came in a low, clear tone:

"I do not love him! He would not make the offer unless I gave him some encouragement! But we must return, Harold, or——"

Heaton darted into the road, and was on the other side of the street before the young couple had turned to retrace their steps.

"So that's how the land lies, eh?" he muttered, his face white with anger. "That must be Harold Winslow! Well, *he* will stand no chance with the old man, and as for Lena, she shall be my wife, and if gratitude will not help me, then I'll arrange it otherwise! I'll begin to-morrow!"

He was very busy all the next day, but he appeared to be satisfied with the result of his doings when he shut himself up in his own special den in the evening.

"That will get the young man right enough!" he laughed. "It will take a fortnight, and then it will be ready. In the meantime, I press my suit and make the other arrangements. I was at first inclined to spare him if she agreed to marry me, but there may be a chance of doing both things, the advantage being that she will lose faith in her idol and fall in love with me as a reaction!"

Heaton presented himself on the following evening at the house of Robert Brookes, and was welcomed in the usual manner by the old man and his daughter. There was no question of the warmth of the father's greeting, but the girl's demeanour was ambiguous. Mr. Brookes looked with a favourable eye on these visits; Heaton was an eligible man, and it would serve to drive from Lena's head any nonsense about young Harold Winslow, if she still harboured any feeling of that kind towards him.

After five minutes of general conversation, Mr. Brookes rose and looked about him.

"I'll ask you to excuse me for a while, Mr. Heaton," he remarked blandly. "I must see Jackson about the property, you know, and Lena can entertain you. Where is that book of views, Lena? Show them to Mr. Heaton."

Lena shot a quick glance at her father, who, however, had half turned from her, and so missed it. Lena felt that there was some concerted action here, so she tried to fortify herself for the ordeal that awaited her.

"Better to have it over and ended!" she thought. "I fancied that he would not be so blind, but he is rushing to his own doom!"

"I am sure that it will be very interesting to hear your explanations of the photographs," Heaton was saying in his most dulcet tones, but Lena did not hear.

He had seen the book, which he understood to be new, as he had not noticed it previously, and he took it in his hands and seated himself in the chair beside hers. He opened the book, but shut it so suddenly that it startled her.

"I have not come here to look at counterfeit presentments, but at a reality, a living, palpitating reality!" he cried with a passionate gesture. It was a genuine expression of passion purposely exaggerated. "Miss Brookes, I have come here with the avowed intention of asking you to let me call you by a less formal name! Fortune has favoured me in giving me a chance to be with you alone. Lena!" He let the book drop, and seized her unwilling hands in his. "Lena! Was it not Fate that caused the accident from the awful results of which it was my good fortune to save you? Can we not see in that the hand of Fate that was to bind us more closely together than could have been possible under any other circumstances? To me, it means the loving and tender care of the one whose life was preserved that it might be linked with mine by the deepest of ties, those of love and gratitude—ties which must have a natural significance to one who is the embodiment of all that is good!"

If Lena Brookes had been less agitated by the torrent of words, which she tried at the outset to stem, she might have detected some insincerity in them. As it was she tried to take her hands from his grasp, essaying to utter the words that appeared unable to leave her trembling lips. Her countenance was pale, her breast was heaving with emotion and anxiety.

"Mr. Heaton!" she gasped at length. "I had not anticipated this! Oh, I am so sorry! It cannot be, for I——"

"You do not know what you are saying, Lena!" he expostulated gently. He was acting a part, now. "In your natural embarrassment, you are uttering words that have no foundation. I know, I feel, that you love me! It must be so, dearest, for our lives were linked together by that fateful slip on the ice! Linked together indissolubly by the closest of bonds. Your life is mine, and it is my duty, as it will be my delight, to insure that your life is crowded with happiness!"

It was an artful speech, and the poor girl turned white to the lips. She owed this man the greatest of all debts, and from the point of view of her code of honour, she must acknowledge his claim. Yet how could she give herself to this man? She did not love him; and, more than all, she had given her word to Harold Winslow that she loved *him* and would marry none other.

"Mr. Heaton," she said, striving vainly to steady her voice, "I cannot marry you! I know that I owe you a great debt, but I cannot suppose that you would wish to marry me against my will. You force me to tell you the truth; I have given my word to another!"

Lena's face now flushed crimson; it was a terrible ordeal for a girl to pass through. Her natural modesty caused her to shrink from making this confession to Heaton; she reproached herself unjustly for giving him pain, for showing what seemed to be ingratitude; yet she was compelled to speak the truth.

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Walter Heaton did not flinch under the blow; he was playing his game with consummate cunning.

"I believe that you are too noble to wish to force me to do anything against my will!" cried the girl before he had time to say a word. "Oh, I am so sorry!"

This appeal showed Heaton that he must act cautiously.

"I am not unprepared for this," he returned calmly, "although it is a bitter disappointment for me to find that my suspicions are correct. But I am actuated even in this by my ardent desire to give you happiness and to save you from disgrace and sorrow. I know, I know! You are alluding to Harold Winslow. Yes, I see that I am correct!" he continued, as she started in surprise. "I am grieved to say it, but you are giving your affection to one who is unworthy! No, no, do not interrupt! I must speak, for your sake, and you will thank me for it in the time to come! Harold Winslow is a scoundrel; if he receives his deserts, he will one day find himself in prison!"

"It is false, false, false!" cried the girl vehemently, as she drew herself up to her full height, her small hands clenched, her eyes flashing. "You are libelling him; you must withdraw those words!"

"Alas! Would that I could, Miss Brookes, for your sake," he answered with assumed sadness. "It is only too true!"

"Prove it!" she cried passionately, but there was less fire in her eyes. There was something convincing in his positive manner; it made her heart sink.

"I will!" he cried, seizing the opportunity. "Give me a fortnight, and I will have ample proof."

"I will see Harold and ask him!" she said in a tone that was almost a wail. "It cannot be true; he is so good, so noble. There must be some mistake!"

"No, you must not mention it to him!" protested Heaton. If she did that it might upset his scheme! "That is not fair, you will be warning him, and he will contrive to elude the consequences of his wrong-doing. You must say nothing, and let us both abide by the result. I claim your promise!"

Lena Brookes was too agitated to do aught save acquiesce. Walter Heaton had carried his first point, and he now did his best to calm the trembling girl, and give her an appearance of ease before the return of her father.

Heaton continued the execution of his plan for ruining Harold Winslow with a calmness and indifference that were callous in the extreme. He weaved the net about the unsuspecting young man in a most skilful manner, and the blow that should strike two innocent persons and make them suffer for misdeeds in which neither had a hand, was prepared with a surety of aim that appeared to exclude the possibility of failure.

Lena Brookes waited in terrible anxiety, alternating between belief in her lover's integrity and doubts concerning his sterling honesty. She dared not meet him, lest she should break her promise, yet she cried herself to sleep night after night in her unsatisfied longing to meet him.

Sometimes she would feel that she must despise herself for her doubts; at others she would be unable to resist the sentiment of doubt that pervaded her.

Fate seemed to be playing into the hands of Heaton, for Harold Winslow was engaged in a large firm which the former had selected as one of his fields of operation. It had become necessary to find a scapegoat on whom to tack the frauds and so relieve his accomplice from suspicion, and Harold was selected.

"It is all going beautifully!" chuckled Heaton, a week after the scene with Lena Brookes. "In less than another week I shall have him in a tight place! Hallo, what is that?"

A knock at the door made him rise lazily from his seat and open it. A man stood outside, and Heaton bade him enter.

"What is it, Dodson?" he asked, with a searching glance.

"Laxton, who is doing that trick in Manchester, arrived home last night," said Dodson without the least perturbation, "and he had a little too much, with the result that he fell under a heavy waggon and got hurt. He died this morning!"

"H'm! He had practically finished the job, so there's no harm done!" remarked Heaton unconcernedly. "You can get another man to finish it, if that is necessary, can't you?"

"Exactly!" replied Dodson easily.

The two men conferred together for a time, and then Dodson left his principal. They had arranged matters to their own satisfaction, and neither was particularly sorry for the accident, as the man had learnt more of his chief than was desirable. "It's a good riddance!" was Heaton's thought. Yet neither guessed how that accident was to affect them!

The fortnight passed away, and Heaton sent a message to Lena in order to ask her to see him. Lena replied in non-committal terms, and Heaton betook himself to Mr. Brookes' residence with a light heart. Everything looked gay, as he himself expressed it; several of his coups were coming off. Lena was bound to submit, and all would be well with him. He would mend his ways, and live happily with her in luxury.

He found Lena looking worried to the last degree, and a quick feeling of regret and pity shot shrough his heart.

"I'll make it up to her when we are married!" he mentally vowed, as he saluted her gallantly.

"My father is out," said Lena in a cold, monotonous voice. "We had better go into his little room, where we can talk without interruption." She led the way, and he followed, blessing his good fortune at having Lena to himself. "Sit down," she said, motioning him to a chair as they entered the room and she closed the door. "You have failed?"

"No!" he cried, throwing himself into the chair, which was a swivel chair placed before a small table. He noted the question with satisfaction; it showed him that she dreaded to hear, expected to hear, that he had been successful. "I have ample proofs!"

She moved away from him without speaking, and sank into another chair a few feet from the table.

"Tell me all!" she commanded in a hollow voice.

"It will distress you, but it is to save you from degradation! I love you too well to permit it; so, even while I inflict pain, I am working for your good! I have proofs here," he continued, spreading some papers on the empty table, "which show what a rascal he is! Come and look at these."

She rose hurriedly, and, pressing her hand to her side, she leant over the table from the opposite side, and tried to follow with unseeing eyes what he was explaining.

It was so clearly set forth that even she could see that Harold Winslow was guilty of a great crime. She wanted to refuse to believe it, but the evidence was so clear! She was not a lawyer, able to pick this and that point to pieces. She uttered a groan and held on to the table for support as Heaton rolled up the papers and slipped them into an inner pocket.

"Is that sufficient, Lena? Will you marry me now?" he asked, springing to his feet and making his way round to her side of the table.

"No, no! I will not!" she cried, raising her voice till he feared

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that the servants might hear and come to their mistress' assistance. "Keep away from me! I will not marry you, I cannot!"

She lifted her hands to thrust him back, and there was such a look of abhorrence and determination on her usually placid and smiling features that he recoiled. He cast a swift glance at her, and he recognised that he must use force now if he wished to possess her. Possess her? He would have her if he died a week after the wedding! His blood was up, but, unlike Lena, he did not show it in his features.

"I have a paper here," he said with calm deliberation, "that will send your lover to prison as certainly as we are looking at it. That paper requires only my signature. Will you be my wife or shall I sign it?"

Moving swiftly to a side table, he brought pen and ink to the table at which he had been sitting; he held his incriminating document tightly in his left hand all the time. Seating himself, he laid the paper on the table, took a pen and prepared to sign.

"For the last time, Lena, will you be my wife or shall I sign this and send your lover to prison?"

"I cannot marry you, I will not marry you!" came in vehement tones from the girl's lips.

"Then I sign it!" he cried, fixing his keen eyes upon her.

He saw an agonised look creep into her eyes; her face was convulsed with conflicting sentiments; she stood over the table and stretched out her hand with a finger pointing to the paper and his pen.

"*Sign that paper if you dare!*" she said. "You are forcing me to it! I owe you my life, but you are taking it from me! I cannot undo the guilt of the man to whom I have given my love, but I can demonstrate my love by saving him! Walter Heaton, if you sign that paper and send my lover to prison, I will bring upon your head the just punishment of your own crime!"

For the first time, Heaton lost his self-possession; her words were so significant, and uttered with such conviction, that they alarmed him.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, springing to his feet and brushing the fatal document to the floor. "I don't understand."

"You are a villain, and you know it!" she cried. "See!" she added, pointing her finger at his now livid face and speaking as if to an invisible judge. "See how guilty he looks! Walter Heaton, I have discovered your crime! The widow of your poor accomplice, forced to do your rascally bidding because you had a hold on him through one false step he had made—his widow received his confession in his last moments. I befriended her, and she told me! I have found out much, for it was right that I should know the real characters of *both* the men who wished to marry me! If you had left me in peace, I would have said nothing, leaving the working of justice to other and higher hands; but you forced me to speak. My gratitude would have held me, but there must be some concession on your part!"

Walter Heaton did not trouble to examine into the logic of her action; all that concerned him was that she had learnt enough to visit his sins upon him if he persisted in carrying out his threat with regard to Harold Winslow. The tables were turned with a vengeance!

She still believed that Harold was guilty! He tried to collect himself, in order to find a way out. Before he had time to utter a word, however, a servant knocked at the door.

"There's two detectives, miss, as wants to come in! I've tried to bamboozle 'em, while I come to you, but they're coming and says as I'll catch it for hindering 'em or my name ain't John, and they 'ave got a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Heaton! Here they come!"

Lena shut the door in the man's face, then turned to confront the man who had saved her life, as she thought. He was trembling in every limb.

"They have found you out!" she cried spasmodically. "I have said nothing. There may yet be a chance of escape, and it is the last thing I can do for you! Quick, through that door, up the narrow staircase to the first floor, then take the servants' staircase to the left, and make your way to the roof! Quick, quick! You can escape that way, along the roofs! I will hold them at that door!"

He hesitated for a moment; for one brief second he forgot himself and thought of the risk she was running in helping him, and of the suffering he had caused her by his fiendish plot against Harold Winslow. Then the instinct of self-preservation gained the upper hand.

"Hold them!" he cried, white with fear. "I may escape!"

He dashed through the opposite door, not stopping even to give a sign that the document on the floor was false. Lena gathered up the paper and thrust it into her pocket; then she locked the door and threw the key through the open window into the shrubbery. The next moment the two officers entered, angry at having been detained.

"Where is he?" demanded one.

"Gone!" declared Lena, laconically, trying to be calm and gain time. Every minute was precious!

One man dashed towards the open window and quickly examined the sill.

"He didn't go that way!" he shouted. "Here, Jack, through this door!"

Lena, by an effort, prevented herself from placing her weak frame between them and the door; that would have betrayed her and him. The officers tried to open the door, but were baffled. It appeared as if Heaton would gain all the time necessary to make good his flight, but the feeling of exultation that was rising in Lena's breast was dashed by the inspiration of one of the detectives.

"I know these houses! That leads to the first floor! Follow me, and we'll have him!"

What happened during the next five minutes Lena never properly understood. She waited with nervously-clasped hands for the result. She waited till she heard a shriek from somewhere above, and then she fell into a swoon. They told her all afterwards.

The officers found Heaton on the roof; there was a short chase, Heaton missed his footing, and fell from the high roof, uttering that shriek as he fell. When picked up he was still living, and he made use of his last moments, as his accomplice had done, to endeavour to right a wrong.

Harold Winslow was amazed when he discovered how narrowly he had escaped prison without being in the least aware of his danger. Old Brookes was so upset, that he vowed that Lena should make her own selection of a husband, which duty she delegated to Harold with a charming blush.

The marriage did not take place for a year, and, when it was solemnised, Mr. Brookes sold his house and went to live in the South of England, near to the pretty estate which he had given to his daughter as a wedding present.

Leslie Grant.

A Word to the Wise.

Probably there is not a reader of *Short Stories* who is not fond of bright, clever fiction; and that being the case, we expect to earn the gratitude of a large number of people by putting them on to a very good thing.

That good thing is "The Food of the Gods"—the great new serial by H. G. Wells, which is appearing in Pearson's Magazine—and it may safely be described as the most powerful and exciting magazine serial ever published. If you have not already started reading it, you had better get the current number of Pearson's Magazine, in which a full summary of the earlier instalments appears, thus enabling new readers to commence the story now.

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A WIFE WHO WAS ABOVE REPROACH.

The Tale of a Happy Married Couple and a Jealous Woman.

PICTURE to yourself one of the large, fashionable houses during one of the most superb receptions of the season; the whole suite of magnificent rooms thrown open, and a blaze of light, odorous with flowers, and gay with the exquisite toilets of women, and the glittering uniforms of the Army and Navy men, and the orders and decorations of the members of the foreign embassies; music was wafted in waves of sweetness from the Marine Band, and altogether nothing was wanting to make the scene one of the most beautiful and attractive to a beautiful and pleasure-loving woman.

Such an one, Kate St. George, stood a little apart from the throng, leaning against a marble pillar, attracting hundreds of pairs of eyes towards her, but not rewarding any one of them with even the most formal glance of recognition. Her gaze, an intent one, was fixed on the face of a man who stood in the same relative position as herself, only on the other side of the room; a man most fair to look upon indeed.

Guy Beauregard was always an object of interest to women, and it was not strange, for a face of such strength and such beauty it is not more than once in a lifetime given to a woman to behold. Just at this moment he was bending over the fair head of his wife, Beatrice; and when it is written that Guy Beauregard loved his wife with all the might of his nature, it is also written that she was perhaps the happiest woman in this world. They had been married five years, and Kate St. George had known them both since before their wedding.

The throng had thinned a little; there was more air, and the fragrance of the rich blossoms was more deliciously strong, and the music came more wooingly than when it had to struggle with such a rush and roar of human voices and merry laughter. There were not, perchance, more than a dozen people remaining in the East Room; Kate St. George turned her handsome, dark head wearily towards the crowd yonder, as though she would summon a cavalier to her side. Beatrice Beauregard glanced quickly about as she spoke:

"Guy, nearly everyone has left us. Come!"

"And what if they have?" murmured the lover-husband.

As they stepped out from the shadows of the columns they beheld the face of a man—young, fine-looking, yet with a haggard expression, whether from illness or dissipation it would be somewhat difficult to decide—and the women both uttered a man's name in almost a whisper, half of horror, half of terror.

"Jack!" they exclaimed; and Kate St. George shrunk back into the protection of the column once more. She was the older and more practised woman of the two, and watched Guy Beauregard. He started slightly as he studied his wife's terrible pallor, and went to fetch her a glass of water. When he returned, the gentleman had disappeared. But little occurred in his absence, and that little Kate St. George bore witness to. A few whispered words, and none of which she caught, save the last, as the stranger walked quickly away.

"Contrive to meet me, Beatrice, for Heaven's sake! in the Blue Room, before you go home—I will wait for you there!"

And Beatrice Beauregard bowed assent eagerly, as she pressed his hand—that was all.

"Here is some champagne, my darling!" cried the young fellow, as he put his arm round her trembling form. "What is the matter? Did that man—was he rude to you, or what made you start so? and I thought you made some exclamation—did you not?"

"Nonsense! Why, Guy, dear, what a ridiculous idea!" Beatrice laughed nervously. "It is the heat—the crowd, you know. I have not been feeling well all day."

"No, my heart," he said soberly, "I did not know it."

"Well, then, it was because I wanted to spare my boy pain and anxiety that I did not tell him."

"Bless your heart." He looked proudly and tenderly down at her from his height. "Then I must take you home at once; these infernal crowds are not fit places for you at any time!"

"No, no!" she answered pettishly. "Not yet. I want to see Mrs. McGregor before I go. I will go and look for her. You wait for me, or——" How obligingly and opportunely at this moment Kate St. George emerged from her place of concealment! "Yes, there is Kate, unescorted now, Guy!" she laughed gaily. "I give you *carte blanche* until I return!"

Kate glanced from husband to wife in remarkably well-feigned innocence.

"How is Mr. Beauregard this evening?" she asked playfully.

"Oh, thanks, Miss St. George, I am in a tolerable state of

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preservation. I need not ask how you are," he said, bending his blue eyes in gallant fashion full upon her face. Guy Beauregard was one of those men who could not help being civil to a woman, or saying the thing and looking the thing he was expected to.

There was a sort of chivalry in the man's nature that furnished him with a creed that women were created to be humoured, but he was loyal as ever knight of old to the lady of his heart.

"I am always well," she replied sweetly; "but——" For an instant Kate St. George hesitated; who shall say whether she lost herself in that moment of hesitation or not? "Shall I risk it? Jack will never betray me—even to *her*. Yes, I will risk all, for I have all to gain and little to lose," she thought to herself, and the instant of doubt was over. She turned her great black eyes up to Beauregard's face. "But I think Beatrice is not looking at all well, especially during the latter part of the evening, since——"

"Since what?" he inquired slowly.

"Why, since that start that she had—that handsome, dark man—an old friend of your wife's, I presume, Mr. Beauregard?"

"Were you——" Guy stopped short and was silent. He felt as though on the brink of some frightful precipice, and, unconsciously to himself, he quivered in every nerve of his strong frame. "Can I get you anything?" he asked cautiously, after a moment's pause.

"Oh, no; thanks."

Kate was radiant.

"Then, with your permission, I will go and find Mrs. Beauregard."

Kate was leaning, with hands clasped in front of her, against the identical column where she had spent a considerable portion of her evening; they had stopped there in their promenade, and she was looking down at the floor with a curious expression on her face.

"I wouldn't, if I were you."

"I do not understand you."

"Then I suppose I must initiate you, Mr. Beauregard, that is all. I heard Beatrice make an appointment to meet the handsome unknown in the Blue Room before she went home!"

"You l——" For a brief second of time—the very first in his whole life—Guy Beauregard forgot his courtesy to a woman, but he broke off shortly with a muttered: "I beg your pardon!"

Kate laughed.

"I suppose you think your wife is like Cæsar's, Mr. Beauregard, eh?—above reproach? Ah, well, I only say, go and see for yourself. I supposed, of course, Beatrice had told you, else I never should have mentioned it."

"See for myself!" he repeated scornfully. "Do you suppose I will play the spy? No. I do consider my wife 'above reproach,' Miss St. George!"

Kate lifted her eyes.

"You are spared the trouble; there goes 'Cæsar's wife'—and the handsome unknown!"

She turned away in an opposite direction, while Guy Beauregard, every drop of his hot blood surging through his veins like fire, watched Beatrice—his wife—hanging on the arm of the man whose sudden appearance, not half an hour since, caused her such apparent anguish.

* * *

"But, Kate?" murmured Beatrice, looking with wild eyes up at her companion's face.

He passed his hand uneasily across his brow.

"I—Kate will not betray me—she will not even recognise me—I——"

"How can she help it?"

"Ah, Beatrice, never mind, never mind—I—you are all, and the only human being in the world for me now. I am not worthy of you. I surely am not worthy to seek, or voice, or hold any woman's love."

"Hush!—quick, there is my husband—you are an old friend of mine from childhood. The name? I forget it?"

He whispered two words in her ear, and Guy Beauregard stood before them.

"Guy"—her voice trembled a little, and her sweet blue eyes were full of some unutterable pathos—"Guy—this is Berkeley Halpine; Berkeley, this is my husband—Guy Beauregard. Mr. Halpine and I are old friends, dear; we knew each other when we were children."

The two men looked at each other. Halpine did not even offer to extend his hand; but in a second Guy Beauregard put out his, and threw his other arm round his wife.

* * * * *

Two months had passed. Berkeley Halpine was a constant visitor at the Beauregards'. It was generally understood that he was in London endeavouring to obtain a foreign consulate, and that his chances, therefore, were not the most promising.

Meantime Society was busying itself with his devotion to Mrs. Beauregard, the woman whom men had vainly tried for the five years of her married life to lure or coerce into even the mild semblance of a flirtation.

"Gone this time!" exclaimed Colonel Templeton, the irresistible. "Pity she hadn't better taste, and taken me instead of that sallow-faced youngling, who looks as though he'd been through a course of India and curry!"

The Colonel was fifty-one.

Beauregard had as yet heard nothing of this. Absorbed in his affairs, he had tried, with a man's best might, to banish for ever from his mind the memory of that night, eight weeks ago, at the ball. There were times when it rose before him like a horrible vision of torture; but he crushed it as he drew in the sweetness of her lips, and listened to the soft words of her shy love telling. He was sitting in his library, hard at work, one morning, when the door suddenly opened, and Miss St. George entered, looking charming in her outdoor dress.

"Oh," she exclaimed, sinking into the most convenient chair, "I am glad that I have found someone! I have been up in the nursery, and Nelly is out with her maid. Servants are so stupid, and I want——"

"I am sorry you have been put to so much trouble, Miss St. George, I am sure; Beatrice is out."

"Oh, I know she is; I met her driving down the avenue with Berkeley Halpine. I want to leave a message with you, please. Tell her that Henriette—the dressmaker, you know—will be ready for her this afternoon, at four. Don't forget, there's a dear boy!"

"I will not."

He bowed profoundly.

"Ta-ta! then. Oh, I nearly forgot—and that Henriette says she cannot find anywhere that peculiar shade of pink that Mr. Halpine admires so much for Beatrice's new evening dress. Don't forget! Ta-ta!"

"One moment!" He laid his hand upon her arm, and the touch thrilled to the core of her heart. "Were those the dressmaker's words?"

"To be sure! Oh, dear me, Mr. Beauregard, the woman is not to be blamed; the whole town is exciting itself over dear Beatrice's flirtation with her old friend, and every woman thinks you so charming and good-natured not to object or act stupidly about it. Really I must go. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

He stood like a thing of flesh suddenly transformed into stone. His wife—his true-hearted darling and pride—the jeer and jest of the most frivolous Society in the world—that of London! No, no—a thousand times no!

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"Guy, dear!"—her fresh, clear voice—"what's the matter?"

"Nothing; your friend Miss St. George has just been here and left word that the dressmaker waits you at four o'clock, and that Mr. Halpine's favourite pink is not to be had anywhere."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Well, never mind. Dear"—she nestled down on a little hassock at his feet—"I have a favour to ask of you—I never asked one before, and you will grant it, won't you?" She took her husband's hands and looked up into his face.

"What is it, Beatrice? Anything on earth that I can in honour I will do for you!"

"Well, you know you have influence—power; you are a strong man, politically speaking, and I want a political favour—I want this foreign consulate for Berkeley Halpine, Guy. I implore it of you—I beg—I beseech—I intreat. He is worthy and capable—and, dear, you will get it for him? I know you will?"

"But he will leave England, then, Beatrice; go away from—from here."

"Why, of course; that is what he wants to do, Guy."

"Child"—he laid his hand upon her fair young head—"say you love me as you did when you married me!"

"No, no, Guy—but so much better, by five years."

"Ah, my little one, I will do my best for your friend; it may be some time before its accomplishment, but——"

Guy Beauregard worked faithfully in behalf of the man whom half the world believed he was only working to be rid of. In a few brief weeks the appointment as British Consul would be officially bestowed upon Berkeley Halpine. Guy and Beatrice and the little Nelly were at the seaside, stopping at the Avenue Hotel, where also Miss St. George was staying for a few days with her friends, the Blanchards, prior to their departure for abroad.

The day for the party to sail had in fact arrived, and when the *Britannic* steamed out of the harbour that afternoon she would bear as precious freight the young woman who, just at this time—9 a.m.—was reading over a letter that had lately been handed her.

"That is all right," she soliloquised. "I fancy the Consul in prospect will not realise his fondest hopes. And now to tell my dear Beatrice of her dear Guy's absorbing passion for me. If I am not very much mistaken, she will fly with Berkeley Halpine to that haven for elopements—the Continent."

Somewhat late in the morning Kate went down and knocked gently at Beatrice's door. In a moment it was softly opened, not by Mrs. Beauregard, but by her husband.

"Beatrice is asleep, Miss St. George. She was out until two this morning—the Meredith ball—and I have just persuaded her to go and lie down on the couch in her room."

"Never mind; don't disturb her, Mr. Beauregard; I'll come down later. We have so much to do and so little time to do it in, that I ventured thus early——" She hesitated an instant; the exquisite room and the soft half-lights through the heavy curtains, the perfumes of flowers, the draperies drawn closely together in the arch leading to the adjoining apartment where Beatrice is, the man whom she adores—worshipped as much as she might with her ignoble nature. Could she turn away? No. "I will come in and rest, Mr. Beauregard, and wait for Beatrice to wake, if you will allow me?"

She saw him stoop and kiss Kate St. George.

"I shall be most happy!"

He drew the most luxurious chair to the window, and placed the morning papers and the freshest magazines beside her, with a plate of fruit and biscuits, and then betook himself back again to his desk and his correspondence. She sat there perhaps fifteen minutes, listening to the tick of the clock, the dulled roar of the streets, and the occasional rustle of the letters that the other occupant of the room was engaged in reading and replying to; for fifteen minutes, and then she could stand it no longer.

She rose and crossed swiftly and noiselessly over to where he sat, and, standing behind his seatshe laid her two hands on his broad shoulders and pressed herred lips down upon his bonny curls.

"Guy!—oh, Guy!" she cried brokenly, "have mercy upon a woman who loves—who worships you!"

"Great Heaven!" he cried, springing to his feet. "Kate!—Miss St. George!—you are mad!—you are mistaking me for someone else! I——" But she is weeping now, clinging and kneeling. "Oh, my poor child!—for Heaven's sake——" He raised her in his arms and laid her on the sofa. "Let me get you some water—some wine—you are ill!"

"Ill!" she repeated passionately. "I am ill unto

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death. I am going away—away—into a far place, out of the sight of your eyes—and I leave you here with her—with Beatrice, who never loved you as I have done—who even now is deceiving you, for she loves this mysterious Berkeley Halpine."

There was a faint rustle in the next room, but the man did not hear it.

"My darling deceiving me?" he cried, in agony and bitterness.

"Kiss me—kiss me once, Guy!" she begged; "there is no harm in your kissing me, since, in a few short hours, we shall be separated for ever!" He bent his head and kissed her brow, and the curtains parted and dropped together again. "Thank you! Heaven bless you, my love!"

She left him sitting like one stunned with a terrible blow; and then in a few moments he dashed out of the room, passing Berkeley Halpine in the corridor as he went. He merely turned to see that the man entered the room which he had just quitted, and then went on his way to quench and still his grief in brandy, whisky—anything.

Beatrice Beauregard stood in the middle of the pretty room, with wild, wide eyes and fallen hair, when the man they called her lover came in and found her.

"Beatrice, what——"

"Hush!"

"No, no! Oh, Beatrice, I must tell you. They are on my track!—they have been given a clue by—by someone. I must fly on a sailing vessel at once, this very day. My darling! My dear Beatrice!"

The young man flung himself on his knees before her, while the tears coursed down his thin cheeks.

"I will go with you!" she cried steadily. "Berkeley, my husband loves someone else. I have heard with these ears, seen with these eyes, and I am going to leave them free to love each other. Do not attempt to remonstrate with me."

She raised her small white hand imploringly.

"But, Beatrice, the man worships you. Who is the woman?"

"The girl whom I always thought loved you."

"Kate!" he exclaimed, in horror. "Oh, no, Beatrice—Guy does not care for her! She"—he faltered—"always has cared for him."

"I have made up my mind," Beatrice Beauregard answered slowly. "I am going to leave my husband—and—my child!" The fierce sobs forced their utterance, and the miserable woman fell on her knees beside her companion. "Berkeley, do not refuse me; you are my refuge—my harbour—my only hope of rest; take me with you!"

"I can refuse you nothing," he replied.

"Take me this hour—this moment—from the home that I would not stoop to call mine an instant longer! When Love has died, I cannot stay to smile and play false over his grave!"

When Guy Beauregard came back from seeing the party off on board the *Britannic*, his wife's maid informed him that "Mrs. Beauregard left the hotel two hours since in a carriage with Mr. Halpine."

* * * * *

At the Hotel Continental at Nice Kate St. George, the Blanchards, Guy Beauregard, and his little daughter and her nurse were staying, for in the ship that sailed next after the *Britannic* Guy had taken passage—a heartbroken man, unable to find a single clue, a faint thread, upon which to hang his hope of finding the wife he had lost, without even a solitary written word to say farewell, or to speak of sorrow—nothing but a terrible, sickening blank.

At Paris he fell in with the Blanchard party, and Kate, who petted and humoured the little Nelly to the top of her bent, was quite careful that the plans of her friends should tally with those of Mr. Beauregard. Kate was an heiress, having come into some fifty thousand pounds, through foreign relatives, some eight years back. So they were all together at Nice.

The stay did not promise to be long: in fact, Guy was unable to rest anywhere for a length of time. He wandered about the Continent like an uneasy spirit, with naught to comfort him but the baby he idolised. Two or three times of late the child had insisted upon it that she had seen her mamma, "that mamma had tissed her and tried about her a dreat deal."

"Dreaming, poor little one! Dreaming!" the father murmured over her golden head. "If it were only so! If I could only find my girl and take her home—if she would come to me! If I could only once lay these hands on *him!* Great Heaven! I——"

The next day—it was to be the last of their stay at Nice—Miss St. George this time insisting that she needed a change at once—when Guy Beauregard came home from a weary walk about the gay streets of the town, he stood in amazement at the open door of the little *salon*.

There stood Berkeley Halpine with his child in his arms, kissing her wee, innocent lips and coaxing her with fruits and sweets. "I will take you to mamma, Nelly; come with me, like a good little girl, to mamma," he said.

"Put down my child!" The voice was one not to be disobeyed, the voice of a man overwhelmed with grief, anger, shame, outraged pride. "Is it not enough that you have robbed me of my wife, that you should steal away our child from me, too? Villain!" he cried, rushing upon the young fellow like a lion in his passionate fury, "what have you done with my wife? Where is she? Tell me, or I will kill you where you stand—coward, miserable scoundrel, that you are!"

"Guy Beauregard," returned Berkeley Halpine, the colour rising in his pale, thin cheeks, "your wife"—he spoke contemptuously, believing the other to have given her love up for another's—"your wife is my——"

"Your what?"

Guy sprang upon him and threw him to the floor.

"Is my sister."

"Mamma, mamma!" lisped the little child; and in another instant Beatrice and her baby were gathered into Guy's strong arms.

"What an affecting tableau!" exclaimed Miss St. George, suddenly appearing upon the scene.

"Oh, Kate!" groaned Halpine, while all the blood forsook his face. "My hour has come at last. Guy Beauregard, Beatrice—you see that woman. I loved her eight years ago with all a boy's first wild passion. I was poor—so was she. At her instigation I forged my employer's name for fifty thousand pounds, and placed it for safe keeping in her hands. Remorse overtook me; I implored her to give me back the money.

"I begged; but she would not—she is living on it now. I fled to South America. I dared not return a year since. I met my sister in London. You, Guy Beauregard, procured me the Consulate to T——. But this woman was not satisfied that I should live and succeed honestly anywhere; she gave the clue to my identity to the police; she drove my sister mad by making her believe that her husband's love was no longer hers.

"Then Beatrice fled with me. Oh, Kate St. George, I must have loved you well to have held my peace so long! Had you only tampered with me—my peace—my lips should never have been unsealed; but hers—no, no! Guy, there is your wife—take her!"

"Beatrice, my darling, forgive me!" cried the strong man, in his joy and anguish.

"Forgive you, dear heart? Ah, I did that long ago; and now there is nothing to forgive, unless for you to pardon me."

"To pardon you?" he said, gathering her and her child again to his heart. "I have a wife such as Cæsar of old had, dear—above reproach!"

And Kate St. George left Nice that very hour, it is presumed, for no trace of her, or of the money she liked so well, has ever been found.

May Vickers.

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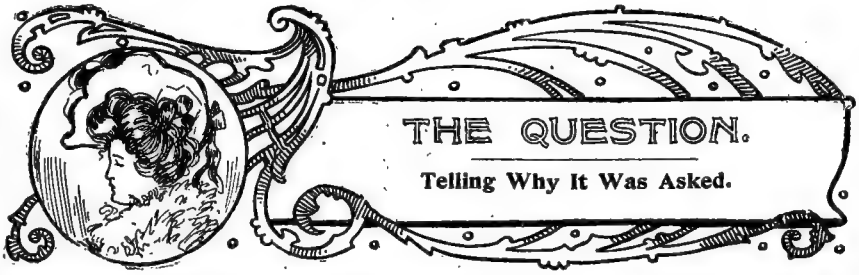

THE QUESTION.

Telling Why It Was Asked.

Travers and Miss Wainwright had been discussing all the latest happenings in their world. Now there came a lull; there seemed to be nothing more to say. Miss Wainwright stared absently into the fire. Presently Travers leant forward and looked at her searchingly.

"Miss Wainwright," he said, slowly, "there is something I want to know. I have been thinking——" He paused, then went on abruptly: "If I ask you a question will you promise to answer it truthfully, yes or no?"

Miss Wainwright looked at him quickly, the colour mounted to her cheeks. Of what was he thinking?

"It depends altogether upon the question," she said. "If I answer it at all, I shall answer it truthfully. What is it?"

"Oh, no, that won't do. Before I ask the question you must promise me that you will answer it, and truthfully, yes or no."

"Well, I won't promise any such thing."

"Then I can't ask the question."

"But possibly it is something that I couldn't answer."

"No, it is something that you can answer, if you will—by a simple yes or no."

"Is it something concerning—myself?"

"Yes."

"Does it concern anyone else besides myself?"

"Well, that would depend on the point of view," Travers said slowly. "In one way I might say that it concerns you alone, and then, again, I might say that it concerns—somebody else. However, I refuse to answer any more leading questions."

Miss Wainwright gazed throughtfully into the fire. Then she looked at Travers again.

"If I knew it wasn't——. But, then, how could you—?" She laughed excitedly, her eyes glowed, she leant forward in her chair with flushed cheeks and parted lips. Oh, what *did* he know?

"Couldn't you—just give me a little hint of what it is?" she said persuasively.

Travers shook his head.

"No, that would be the same as telling you outright."

"Well, then, I will do this—I will promise to answer you truthfully, unless it is a question on one certain subject, which—which I really couldn't—wouldn't have any right to answer, you know. Will that satisfy you?"

"That isn't fair at all. You might refuse to answer; then, in any case, you would know what I wanted to ask, and I would know nothing."

Miss Wainwright pushed back her hair petulantly.

"You are unkind. I don't see where the fairness of your proposition comes in. To make one promise to answer a question before one knows what it is! No, I won't promise!"

"Then let us drop the subject," said Travers.

For some time they sat in silence. Then she said suddenly:

"You will tell me the question you were going to ask, won't you?"

She leant forward coaxingly, irresistibly. Travers hesitated, then he gathered himself together.

"I had rather not say any more about it."

"I promise," she said, quickly, as if fearful of a second thought.

"Well, it is simply this. Weren't you getting just a little sleepy before we began this question business? Now answer me truthfully."

Miss Wainwright stared at him with wide open eyes.

"Mr. Travers, you don't mean to tell me that that is the question?"

"That is the question. I have tried it before on girls when things were getting a little dull, you know, and I have never known it to fail yet. It wakes them up; they always get excited, their cheeks glow and their eyes sparkle; they look awfully pretty, and it is the most amusing game I know. They invariably promise in the end."

Travers leant back and chuckled, until a deluge of sofa pillows almost smothered him. Nevertheless, as he walked home he said to himself:

"There is no getting round a woman. If I had asked her the question which she had in her mind she wouldn't have answered it. I saw in her face that she meant to break her promise."

Venita Seibert.

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Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

EPISODE EIGHT.

The Morocco-Bound Book.

The morocco-bound book proved weirdly fascinating, and, after looking round my rooms to make sure that neither of the maids was there, I shut the door. Then I sat down to investigate the inside of the volume, and what I read seemed to turn my very blood cold, for each chapter proved to be a concise treatise on the special effects of various poisons.

Some of these, by their apparently significant bearing upon recent events, attracted my instant attention, and I read of one poison which produced slow stupefaction, of others that would throw the victim into a fainting fit that would end fatally, and of others whose action could be prolonged many months without producing any symptoms except those of a wasting decline.

But one chapter was even more absorbingly interesting than the rest, for it dealt with a pernicious drug, easily administered in wine or spirits, which produced temporary paralysis of that portion of the brain which governs the faculty of memory.

"There is but one antidote to the condition induced by the administration of this toxicological marvel," continued the article, "and that is to be found in the vegetable kingdom. Take some Dutch tulips, express the raw juice, give the patient a teaspoonful of this juice, and its immediate effect will be to neutralise the poison so as to restore its normal action to that part of the brain which has been held in bondage."

The book fell from my nerveless fingers, and I closed my eyes as though to shut out the awful spectres of suspicion which faced me.

"Surely, surely," was my gasping thought, "I must be mad to imagine there can be any connection between this fiendish book and——"

"Ah, there it is! Vivienne, my dear! What a terrible fright you have given me! I was afraid that one of the maids had picked up that silly collection of impossibilities, and I am thankful to find it here, for there is no telling what stupid notions it might put into the heads of ignorant people."

Mrs. Sherwood, noiseless as a cat, had opened my door, and stolen in upon me quite unperceived. But, with almost miraculous self-control, I opened my eyes so slowly as to seem still half asleep. Then, yawning, and stretching myself, I said lazily: "Oh, it's you, is it? I thought you were going to sleep. Are you better?"

"Yes, dear, quite better. But you—you look pale."

"Very likely. I feel pale. I wanted to go out, but was kept indoors to amuse people I don't care about. When father asked me to see you to your room, I thought there was a fine chance to amuse myself in my own way, without going back to the drawing-room. So I borrowed a book, thinking it was a novel. But it proved to be too stupid for anything, so I fell asleep, and I think that a longer nap would have done me good."

"You should have asked me for a book. I could have lent you a splendid novel."

"Very well. Send Annchen with it now, and I will read it till it is time to dress for dinner."

Mrs. Sherwood smiled her approval, and walked off with her recovered volume, being followed by another audible yawn from me. She seemed to be quite satisfied that "The Life and Methods of Lucrezia Borgia" held no interest for me. But the chances were that she was dissembling just as much as I was, and the conviction was borne in upon me that I must trust her no more than I would trust a snake.

I also knew that never again would I have the chance of seeing the book of poisons. But I had had it long enough in my possession to make a valuable discovery, and I resolved to experiment upon Alan Melrose on the following morning. If the vegetable antidote failed to restore his lost memory, it would still add enormously to my peace of mind, for it would remove therefrom a most dreadful suspicion of deliberate foul play. If, on the other hand, it proved efficacious, it would be an incalculable blessing to the unfortunate Alan and his

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sisters, although my own mental anguish would no doubt be intensified.

So I planned to act upon the directions given in the book, and, in the meantime, strove to appear as usual. I was, however, not at all pleased at the facility with which I was constantly being interrupted when in fancied privacy.

My father laid great stress upon having all the hinges and locks in the house in such perfect condition that the doors would open and shut noiselessly. But such perfection as this had its drawbacks, and I resolved to emphasise my objection to it by locking my door the next time a friend called on me.

When I first came home from school, I was told that I was to preside over my father's palatial establishment, but my presidency had so many limitations that it soon practically became non-existent. Certainly, I was the nominal mistress of the house, with a large staff of servants to do my bidding.

But everything seemed to go on by clockwork, and it very often happened that though several people were invited to dine with us, it was not always considered necessary to inform me of the fact. So I was by no means surprised that Claude and Clarissa Greatham, after going home to change into evening attire, had come back to have dinner here, at my father's invitation. Notwithstanding my professed indifference on their account, I was very glad to see them, for I wanted to warn them against putting any money in the New Barbary Land Development Company, if I could do so without being observed by my own people.

Not even to myself did I explain my full reasons for being anxious on their behalf. And as for being explicit with them, how was that possible?

Beyond the fact that there had been abnormally erratic behaviour on the part of those whom I knew to have dabbled in the business, I had nothing which I could cite in support of my objections to this particular investment.

For how dared I even hint that, contrary to popular opinion, my father was not a Mascot, who brought good luck to all who sought his advice, but a Hoodoo, in whose wake there seemed to follow a long procession of calamitous events?

Nevertheless, I meant to bestow my warning in some form or other. But strange to relate, neither during dinner nor after did I find a minute's chance of a confidential word with either Claude or Clarissa, and it now dawned on me that every moment was being quietly and unostentatiously supervised.

What could be the reason of this? Was it possible that my vague suspicions had some foundation in fact, and that it was feared that I should make undesirable disclosures? Was my tongue being muzzled? And were my movements being curtailed, so as to restrict me to a circumscribed sphere of action?

Or perhaps—and here a more charitable line of argument crept in—perhaps my father, having concluded that Claude Greatham's openly displayed admiration for me was distasteful to its object, had decided to spare both of us the embarrassment which a proposal and consequent refusal would entail.

Anyhow, whatever the reason might be, the fact remained that I had no chance of giving my warning, and I had to console myself with the resolve to drive round to Clarissa Greatham's address next morning, after I had been to see Alan Melrose and his sisters.

My father, always anxious for me to enjoy life, had insisted that I must not allow Lady Windelmore's death to interfere with several social engagements I had made, and there were two receptions that night, from which I should have found it impossible to excuse myself, even if I had wished to do so. Mrs. Sherwood, it seemed, was not feeling well enough to go out, so I was to be escorted by my father himself, whose sudden cultivation of my society was becoming rather irksome to me, for it must be confessed that not all the kindness he had displayed towards me was able to kindle that devoted filial love which a daughter ought to feel for her parent.

The first of the receptions, held at the town house of the Dowager Lady Blankerley, was a dull, stiff affair, characterised by a total absence of the kind of people that my father liked me to cultivate, so we soon passed on to the Hon. Mrs. Donoughvan's, where everything was gay and sparkling.

"There are several men here whom I want you to capture," whispered my father, and I replied rather mutinously:

"You speak as if I were a bandit, or a policeman, and as if I were here solely to make conquests."

"That is exactly what you are here for. If it were all one what you did, or where you went, I should not have gone to either the trouble of bringing you here, or the expense of providing you with more costly attire than anybody else is wearing."

I looked round at the crowd of well-dressed members of Society, who, under cover of some of the best music to be had in London, were exchanging gossip with each other, and saw that for personal richness, my white *crêpe-de-Chine* gown, with its costly embroidery in real pearls, could not be equalled by that of anybody else in the room.

But it was something new to have the question of expense brought home to me, and, for the first time, I wondered if I were being paraded as a sort of speculation which was expected to return both capital and interest in due course.

The very idea roused my pride, and I answered, with some warmth:

"If my costumière's bills are too heavy for you, I will economise in future."

"Don't be so silly! I am not asking you to economise. All I want of you is to encourage desirable men to come to our house, so that I can have plenty of bright society about me without having to come out to seek it. But I suppose you are like all other daughters I have ever heard of—you grudge the least return for the many benefits heaped upon you, and you do not realise that you have duties as well as privileges."

This reproof hurt me to the quick, and, to show how undeserved it was, I exerted myself to the utmost to appear as brilliant, as attractive, and as free from care as I was when I was first introduced into Society at the beginning of the season. The result was that my father's expectations were more than realised, and amongst those who sought permission to pay their early respects to me were a Russian prince of fabulous wealth, the heir to an English earldom, and two wealthy Englishmen who had made fortunes by turning their businesses into limited liability companies.

The first was fat and fifty. The second was thin and thirty. The third was round and rosy. The fourth was long and lanky. So far as my own inclination went, I would not have encouraged one of them. But I saw that my father seemed to like them all, though I could not help thinking that, if they had been poor, he would have regarded them even more indifferently than I did myself.

* * * * *

Although I did not get to bed until nearly two o'clock, I was up in good time next morning, for I intended to go out soon after breakfast in my own rooms to visit Sophie Melrose. Even if I were asked to go out shopping, or for a drive, with Aunt Flora, I was not likely to be wanted by her for a couple of hours, for she never went out before half-past eleven, and I meant to slip out quietly, and take a hansom, instead of using the smart little *coupé* placed at my special disposal.

So I told Annchen to have my outdoor things in readiness for me to start at once, and I was by no means pleased to receive a visit from Aunt Flora.

"Good morning, dear," she smiled; "I don't suppose you expected to see me for hours yet. But dear Beverley sent me a note after he came home last night, saying that urgent business would take him to his City office very early, and that, as he wanted specially to see us both, we were to call there for him at a quarter past ten."

This was vexing news, though at any other time I

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would have hailed it with pleasure, for I had felt some curiosity to visit the City office in which so much unostentatious charity was dispensed. Now, however, I wanted to be elsewhere, and I promptly said so.

"I can't go with you this morning," I protested. "As you know, I have an appointment with Sophie Melrose, and I mean to keep it."

"I am very sorry, but you will have to disappoint Miss Melrose this time. Your father's orders are imperative, and you know that he is not the kind of man to be disobeyed."

"Then I shall send a message to say that I will see Sophie Melrose immediately after lunch."

"A very good idea! Write the note now, and Annchen shall go at once with it."

I complied with this suggestion, though I felt very disappointed, and was presently *en route* for the office, which proved to be situated down a court off Lombard Street. Greatly, however, to my increased vexation, we were told that Mr. D'Alton had been compelled to go out, and had left a message for us to await his return. So there was nothing for it but to muster what patience I could, and the little stock I had was entirely exhausted when, at twelve o'clock, my father put in his belated appearance.

He was full of apologies for having kept us waiting, and I felt that there was need of apology when it turned out that the important business which had brought us thither was nothing more than an appointment with a photographer to whom the influential millionaire had promised his patronage.

"I'm afraid it's too late to go to Mr. Vaughan now," he said; "we must manage better another time."

Of course I could not wisely say all that was in my mind. But I did not hide my disappointment at having missed going to the Melroses' because of an unwelcome appointment which had led to nothing after all.

We reached home rather late for lunch, and as soon as it was over, I ordered my *coupé* to be brought round at once.

"You took my note to Miss Melrose?" I asked Annchen, who replied respectfully: "Yes, miss; and I wondered how it was that everything was in such a bustle. The servants were running about as if something had happened, and Miss Melrose herself told me to say that she would write and thank you as soon as she could."

This message was absolutely unintelligible to me. For why did Sophie need to write when she expected to see me sooner than a letter could reach me by post? However, the only way to remove my mystification was to go before any more hindrances occurred, and my carriage stopped, within an hour, outside the house in which Alan Melrose lived with his sisters.

Greater still, however, was my surprise when, instead of being admitted, I was told that the Misses Melrose had left London, taking with them their brother, whom they were going to place under the care of a famous specialist.

More than this I could not gather. The servants knew neither the name nor the abiding place of the specialist, and I could have sat down and cried there and then to think that while I was meeting with a series of trivial but effective hindrances, the unfortunate Alan was being taken beyond the reach of the antidotal experiment whereby he might possibly have been restored to his former state of mind.

"Perhaps Sophie's letter will explain everything," I told myself, as I was once more being driven homewards. "She must have heard of the specialist since she called to beseech my aid, or she would have mentioned him when she was here. I only hope a cure will be effected."

We were nearly home when I remembered that I wanted to advise Clarissa Greatham against investing in anything that was recommended to her on account of big possibilities, and, pulling the check string, I ordered my coachman to drive to her house.

Then I gave myself up to try to solve the many things that puzzled me, and took no more notice of my surroundings until we actually drew up at home!

"How dared you drive me here without calling first at the address I gave you?" was the angry question I put to the coachman, who professed to be quite surprised at the mistake that had been made.

"Please, miss, I'm very sorry," he said; "but I thought you meant that I was to drive you to see Miss Greatham the next time you used the *coupé*."

The man was lying. I knew it by the shifty expression of his eyes, but I disdained to argue with him, though the sudden conviction that even the coachman told off for my special service was acting as a kind of spying restraint on my movements, gave me a severe shock.

But what could be the meaning of it all?

Many hindrances had prevented me from seeing the Melroses again. Were these hindrances premeditated? And had I been carefully kept out of the way until I could no longer communicate with them?

I certainly began to think so, and a vague terror possessed me when I remembered how oddly I had been prevented from talking to the Greathams. But I am not a nervous subject, and the instinct of self-defence soon asserted itself to such purpose that I was able to seem only mildly vexed when I met Aunt Flora, gaily dressed, and smiling benignantly, crossing the hall.

"I shall tell father to speak sharply to Bryce," I said in the tone of a petulant child. "I told him to drive to the Greathams', but he brought me straight home."

"Ah, well, dear, you mustn't blame Bryce," was the gentle reply; "you know how particular your father is about your being in to receive afternoon callers, and I daresay poor Bryce had his orders to get home before four o'clock."

"Upon my word, I am treated as if I were a little child."

"There are thousands of girls in London who would go wild with delight if they thought they were going to be half as well treated as you."

This reproof was so palpably true that I almost reproached myself for being ungrateful, and I made no demur when Aunt Flora suggested that I should have my toilet attended to at once, lest visitors should find me unprepared.

Thus it happened that we both went upstairs together, and when Aunt Flora saw my boudoir door closed behind me, I daresay she thought I had been easily hoodwinked. But I was not quite so docile as I seemed, for as soon as I knew that she was out of sight, I hurried softly downstairs again. I had heard the postman's knock, and meant to see if anything had arrived for me. Quick as I was, Annchen was before me, and I saw her take, from the pile lying on the table, two letters on which I could read my own name.

She was about to put them into her pocket when, swift as thought, I crept up behind her, and snatching the letters out of her hand, said sternly: "The next time you fetch my letters up for me, put them on a salver at once, and not into your pocket, which is not the proper place for them."

For an instant Annchen's eyes flashed venom. Then she said humbly: "I'm very sorry, miss. I shall know better next time."

Notwithstanding her feigned humility, I felt sure that the girl was furious because she had been deprived of the letters, but it was not until I came to read them myself that I knew their possession to be a matter of life and death.

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

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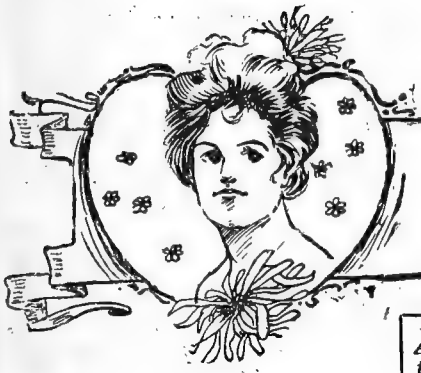

Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

No. IX.—THE ORDEAL OF DAVID HUME.

A WELL-PRESERVED, grey-haired woman was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair by a blazing fire one cold December day. The room and its occupant were well suited to each other; they were both clothed in excellent taste, handsomely, yet not aggressively, fashionable; they both impressed the observer with an idea of riches without ostentation.

It was evident that she expected a visitor, for the silver kettle was left boiling and bubbling, and the tea was still unmade in the silver teapot, and the look of anxiety on her face cleared at the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

A man of medium height with a thoughtful, clever face, entered the room. He looked about forty, but, really, he was rapidly nearing his fiftieth year. His hair was thick and wavy, but strongly tinged with grey, which, however, only served to intensify the depth of his deep-set, dark eyes; his face was clean-shaven, and showed all the sweetness and strength of the lines of mouth and chin. Altogether, a man to be loved and trusted; not perhaps a successful man—the eyes were too soft and dreamy for that—but a man who would never fail one in one's need.

"Oh, David," cried Mrs. Craven, coming to meet him with both hands outstretched, "I am so glad you have come; I feared something might prevent you, and I really must have a talk with you to-day."

"You know I am always at liberty on a Friday, for my week's work is done by then, and there is only my pleasure to consider," he replied in a musical voice.

"Yes, I know; but whenever one particularly wants a thing all sorts of unexpected accidents crop up to prevent it. Also, I must beg you to forgive me for dragging you away from your real pleasure, your etching——"

"No, no, Eleanor—my real pleasure is to be of service to my friends. Tell me now, what is troubling you?"

And he seated himself, drawing up his chair in the manner of a man who feels at home.

But now that he was there, Mrs. Craven seemed in no haste to broach the subject of her anxiety. Instead, she chatted pleasantly on indifferent subjects till the tea was finished and removed.

"No, thank you; no lamps yet," and the soft-footed domestic withdrew.

"I think one can talk better by the firelight," she explained half apologetically, and David Hume replied:

"Your subject seems to cause you embarrassment?"

"Why, yes, frankly it does—you see, it is about Etta."

There was no movement from the figure opposite her, half hidden in the chair, only a sort of tense stillness.

"I am troubled about her," went on Mrs. Craven hurriedly; "she has refused Charlie Mowbray for the second time."

There was a short silence, and then David said:

"Why does *that* trouble you?"

"He is a charming young fellow, and very much in love with her; he would make her an excellent husband. It is most provoking that she should refuse what any girl would jump at——"

"One thousand pounds a year, and—youth," said the man meditatively, the last word almost a sigh.

"Well," she replied, "the one thousand pounds a year is not to be despised, though I should not dream of urging the marriage if it were only that, but we have known him so long and he is a thoroughly good fellow. John says so, and you know the value *he* puts upon character."

"What does John think about it?"

Mrs. Craven leant forward.

"He says if she can find her happiness with Charlie he would be very pleased, but he is not going to speak to her about it—that is a woman's affair."

"Surely you don't want me to do so?" cried David in an alarmed voice.

"Yes, I do," replied Mrs. Craven firmly. "Listen!"—and she enjoined silence by holding up her hand. "You know that six months ago John found out that his partner had been embezzling money. Well, the bank could not afford a scandal, the partnership was dissolved, and John has to pay back all the money that young Hilton had taken. The world must not guess, for should there be a sudden demand on the bank, it must close, therefore we still live like this," and she waved her hand comprehensively. "You alone know of this affair, and if you think, you will see how important it is that Etta should be comfortably married, for we can settle nothing on her, and should the secret leak out, the crash may come at any moment."

David was gazing thoughtfully at the fire, and made no reply.

"You know what a great influence you have always had with the child——"

"Surely Etta is a woman now," and there was an unwonted sound of impatience in his voice.

"She is only twenty," urged the woman of fifty-three. "In the eyes of the law she is not old enough to sign away money; why should she be any more fit to throw away the intangible treasure of an honest young fellow's love?"

David smiled at the argument.

"Well, what does Etta say herself? What excuse does she give for such silly behaviour?"

Mrs. Craven glanced at him nervously, and then spoke slowly, with her gaze on the leaping flames.

"She says she might have loved him had no ther ideal been something very different; something older, graver, deeper, something infinitely above her——"

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David's heart seemed to stand still as he forced the question from his lips:

"And this ideal—has she found it in real life?"

"She thinks so," replied Mrs. Craven significantly.

The silence grew intense; in David's ears there was only the sound of the thumping of his heart, which seemed to him to grow louder and louder till he thought his companion must hear it. To speak just then without betraying his emotion was beyond even his self-control.

Suddenly Mrs. Craven rose and stood before him, and spoke in a passionate pleading:

"*Now* do you see why I want you to speak to her? Poor, foolish child, that is the only way to show her how hopeless is her dream without letting her know she has betrayed her secret. You have always been a sort of god to her from her childhood, and in your kindness you have almost made a friend of her despite her immature mind. How should she understand the real nature of her love, that it is a religion, and not love at all? How should she know that it will not bear the terrible intimacy of married life? That it would not survive the discovery that you are a man and not a god? How should she see the gulf that lies between you? The gulf of mental growth, of experience of life, of years—the gulf that will widen with every decade? How should she know that she would never be a mate for you, that your mind and heart are given to your art? Or realise the wearing struggle it would be for you to earn enough to keep two? Into her innocent child-like worship practical thoughts have never come; we must think for her, and save her from wrecking her life."

Her voice sank, as in a whisper, and stretching out her hands to him in appeal, she added:

"Ah, David, do not be vexed with the poor child. Pity a mother's anxiety for her only daughter's happiness, and speak to her about this marriage. It is the only way to make her really understand what are your feelings towards her. I do not want you to seriously urge her to marry Charlie; let her refuse him again, but I do intreat you to set her heart free that she may be able to love, with an everyday, human love, some man who is worthy and of a suitable age."

Her appeal made, the mother waited anxiously for his reply, but the man that sat so still saw pictures in the fire. Etta, the tiny, dark-eyed baby; Etta, the winsome, imaginative child; Etta, the gentle, sensitive maiden, whose mind he had helped to train, and who had so often startled him by flashes showing her intimacy with the Higher Knowledge; Etta, the woman, who was enshrined in his heart, in the holiest of holies to which none other had yet had access.

At last he rose from his chair, and spoke, but his tongue moved stiffly, and he found it difficult to form his words.

"Eleanor, you and John have been my friends for thirty years, and I would give my right hand if it could be of any service to you, but in this matter I cannot decide without time for thought. Give me till to-morrow."

"God bless you, David!" cried Mrs. Craven with a sob in her voice as he gave her his hand. "I knew you would not fail me."

And David walked out of the room like a man in a dream.

"What a dear, delicate-minded fellow he is!" murmured Mrs. Craven. "He evidently does not like the difficult task, perhaps he fears the responsibility; but he is as sensitive as a woman, and I know he will never let dear Etta guess that he knows her secret. I am glad that I had the courage to tell him."

Meanwhile David paced the cold, wet streets.

Why was this dazzling vision shown to him only to be snatched away? If Etta loved him, and God alone knew how he loved her, why should he not tell her of it? Why should they not be happy? Had he not a right to happiness like any other man? And did she not love him?

But then he knew the great question was, what would be for her happiness?

On the one side, Charlie Mowbray, young, strong, and noble-natured, with a good income, and a beautiful home to take her to, where they might grow old together and see their children grow up around them

On the other hand, himself, elderly, poor and unambitious, living on a bare two hundred pounds a year as a designer, which had hitherto satisfied his few needs, and devoting all his spare time to etchings which gave satisfaction to his soul, but brought in barely enough to cover their expense. He felt himself the father of her higher intelligence, but—he was thirty years her senior.

How ought he to act?

L. Hughes.

Unique and Interesting.

A competition which embraces a totally new idea is a rarity. In these days it is a very difficult task to discover something novel, some idea that has not already been worked to death. But the new competition, a preliminary announcement of which appears on page 265, will exploit fresh fields. In this will lay one of its greatest charms. In our issue dated March 12th the competition will commence, and in order that the scheme shall come as a greater surprise to you I shall not divulge full details of it until then. Bear in mind these important facts; firstly, that the competition will be simple, yet interesting in the extreme; secondly, that anybody, irrespective of age or station, may enter with equal opportunities; and thirdly, that the prizes offered are magnificent ones. Do not forget that the competition will commence the week after next. Let your friends and acquaintances know what is coming, so that they, too, may endeavour to win a fine award

The Ninth Love Problem.

On the previous page appears the ninth Unsolved Love Problem. I am offering a prize of one guinea to the reader who sends me, not later than first post, Friday, March 4th, what I consider to be the best advice for David Hume under the circumstances. Replies should be written in not more than a hundred words, on one side of the paper only. State as clearly as possible *why* you consider your solution to be the best.

Mark your envelopes "Ninth Love Problem" in the top left hand corner, and address them to the "Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C."

Remember that the last possible date on which I can receive replies is Friday, the 4th of next month. None arriving after then will be considered.

The Eighth Love Problem.

"The Difficulty of Hugh Chester," as the eighth problem was entitled, brought forth letters from very many readers. I shall announce the winner of the guinea in my next chat.

Your Editor.

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FOR EDITH'S SAKE.

The Tale of a Wrong Forgiven.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Above the roaring of the wind, above the swash of the driving rain, above the beating of the angry waves against the beach, rose the sound of the reports that implored aid for a sinking vessel.

In a hut just beyond the reach of the storm-tossed waves a man raised his head and listened. A man with a thin, delicately-featured face, coal-black hair and eyes, and long, slim, hands. A man whose whole appearance, even in the dimly-lighted hut, contradicted the coarse dress he wore, the utter penury of the room, that was the only one that the cabin contained.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Again, rising above the battle of the elements, pathetic in its monotonous appeal, came the sound of a minute gun.

The man stood erect, took a lantern from the wall, lighted it, and opened the door of his hut.

The sudden rush of wind and rain drove him back for a moment; then, as he was, bareheaded, he strode into the darkness beyond. Only the feeble glimmer of his lantern, the occasional flashes of vivid lightning, guided his steps as he turned his face to the coast.

Below him, where the fishermen had a small colony of cabins, lanterns gleamed, and men were collecting in groups. But where he stood, upon higher ground, his was the solitary figure. Women looked up at the starlike glitter of his lantern, and said:

"The hermit is out to-night. Will he come down here to help, or look on as usual?"

For on that wild coast shipwrecks were not infrequent. It was but watching to save such lives as the sea spared them, for no boat could live for a moment in a storm there; but on the chance of reviving such as were washed ashore these men and women waited patiently.

Whether the man they called the hermit would have crossed the rocky cliff to where the fishermen were gathered can only be conjectured, for, as he stood quietly waiting alone, the waves carried to his very feet the lifeless form of a man, and instinctively he clutched it before it could be washed back again.

Half lifting, half dragging it, he succeeded in carrying it to his hut and putting it upon the rude bed there. Then, lighting a second candle, he brought spirits from a shelf and rubbed the temples, trying to force some drops between the clenched teeth. The face the candles revealed was a youthful one, not over twenty-one or two, dark-complexioned, with aristocratic features. The dress was fine in texture, and on one finger glittered a diamond ring of quaint design.

"Quite dead!" the hermit muttered, as he drew off the ring and examined it. "Quite dead!" he repeated, slipping it upon the smallest of his slender fingers.

Then he stripped the body to rub it with spirits, to wrap it in a coarse blanket, to try again to bring life back. This he intended; but as he took off the garments a belt of soft leather, sewed in compartments, was revealed, and this he hastily loosened and carried to the table where the candles burnt. With eager, trembling hands he ripped open one of the little bags of which the belt was composed, and there rolled out a diamond, large, pure, and dazzling. Another, another, and the man's face was eager and wild, counting the wealth before him, when a weak voice said, "My friend!" and starting, he saw the man he had rescued sitting upright upon the bed, looking steadily into his face.

A mad rage seized him that the treasure should be threatened, and, in an insane fury, he seized the wooden chair upon which he had been sitting, and aimed one blow at the rescued man. Only one before his senses returned, and a chill of horror shook him from head to foot. Without word or groan, utterly overwhelmed by the sudden attack, the stranger dropped back upon the bed.

The hermit, with shaking hands and chattering teeth, huddled on again the clothing he had removed, taking no notice of what further wealth might be there, only hastening—as if already he felt the hangman's hand at his threat—to remove the traces of his murderous act.

Trembling yet, he dragged the form out into the darkness to the spot where he had found it, gave it a push into the hungry waves again, and fled back to his cabin.

Still shaking, white as the man he had murdered, he gathered the glittering treasures into the belt, clasped it round his own body, and, wrapping himself in his cloak, drew a hat over his eyes and again went into the darkness outside.

Not to the sea this time, but over the inland road; fiercely battling the storm at every step, the man sped from the lonely hut his own hand had turned from a rude home into a spot accursed for ever—fled, with the brand of Cain upon his brow.

* * * * * *

"My Dear Edith.—*You will be rejoiced, I have no doubt, to hear that I am still amongst the living, and not only that, but once more I have my hand upon such gifts of fortune as will enable us to resume something of our former state. Tell your Aunt Margaret that I shall ask her hospitality for a few days, until I can arrange our future household, when I look to you, my dear child, to make a home for one who has long been exiled from you. I shall be with you on Tuesday.—Your affectionate father,*

"James Montgomery."

This letter being opened in a cosy sitting-room in a London mansion, where evidences of luxurious comfort spoke silently of the wealth of the owner, engrossed the reader so entirely that a second occupant of the room looked up in surprise.

"Who is your correspondent, Edie?" she said. "You look as if the fate of nations depended upon that letter."

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Edith Montgomery raised her face, disclosing large, dark eyes, a coronet of golden-brown hair, and a countenance at once noble and gentle.

"My letter is from my father," she said.

Mrs. Ross, whose face was like Edith's, though matured by some fifty years of life's experience, dropped from her hands her dainty worsted work in unfeigned consternation.

"Your father?" she cried. "Where is he?"

"The letter is not dated, but post-marked Glasgow. He will be here on Tuesday."

And Edith read the letter aloud.

"It is characteristic of your father," said Mrs. Ross, "to remain all these years silent, and suddenly return with a fortune. And you may be sure it is no small sum that will content him, dear. I congratulate you, my child."

But there was no exultation in the girl's face. Consternation would better describe it, though it was scarcely that, either. More a bewildered terror.

"Aunt Margaret," she said, suddenly, "it is so long since he went away that I forget him. Why did he go? Why has he let us suppose him dead?"

"Ah, my dear, that last is a hard question to answer. I should attribute it all to a stubborn pride, if I were to judge. There is no great mystery about it, Edie. Your father made a mammoth fortune by successful speculation, and lived up to the full limits of an almost princely income. I remember your mother, my dear sister, Edith, closed your infant robes with diamond-studded clasps. And your childish dresses were trimmed with lace fit for a queen's robes, and your father's entertainments were the wonder even of our extravagant city. Your mother died when you were but four years old, and your father allowed you to come to my widowed, childless home. Five years later, as suddenly as riches had come to James, they fled from him, and by the same road—speculation. He came to me, intending to leave the city and to take you with him. But I pleaded so hard to keep you that he yielded to my wish."

"I remember that," Edith said. "It was ten years ago."

"Ten years ago, dear. After honourably meeting every obligation, leaving no debt unpaid, your father, with about a hundred pounds, left London. The letter you hold in your hand is the first token he has given of his existence in ten years."

"I have such a vague recollection of him!" Edith said. "Yet I think I should know him. I remember him as a tall, slight man, with dark eyes, dark hair, and a look of energy and spirit, as if ever eager to be moving. A man, in my memory, who would wrestle with fortune till one was conqueror."

"An eminently handsome man, my dear. You have his features, Edie, but not his expression. That is all your mother's. But this is Tuesday. I must see about preparing a room for your father."

Yet it was slowly, with a heavy sigh, not gladly, Mrs. Ross left the room to attend to the comfort of her expected guest. She could not forget for one moment that this sudden, unexpected return threatened separation between herself and Edith, the child she had taken into her warmest love for fifteen years.

And Edith, dressing mechanically, in becoming attire, to do honour to this almost unknown father, was haunted with dread. A new home, new love—all strange—was a prospect from which she shrank, remembering what a happy home, what warm, tender love she would be called upon to leave.

It was a dreary evening when aunt and niece met again in the sitting-room, where the fire crackled in an open grate, and the shaded lamps made a pleasant light. Both ladies were richly dressed, but upon both faces was a deep pallor and an expression of sadness.

"I delayed dinner," Mrs. Ross said, "in case your father comes by the seven o'clock train. Hark! Surely that was a carriage."

A peal at the door bell, a step across the hall, and the traveller was ushered into the room. Edith's heart contracted with sorrowful dismay as she went quickly forward to meet her father. All other emotion was swallowed up in a tender pity for the feeble old man who waited her welcome. Even Mrs. Ross forgot all else, looking at the wreck of the man who had been "handsome James Montgomery" for years.

Together, with all womanly tenderness, they welcomed him, drawing a chair to the fire, taking his hat and coat, and speaking words of warmest welcome.

It was the cold, they thought, that had driven all the colour from his face and made him tremble so violently. But the cold had never aged him so that he looked like a man of seventy, with snow-white hair and deeply-lined forehead.

After a few moments, the agitation of again meeting his child over, James Montgomery became calmer, and could thank his hostess for her kind welcome.

"I have been very ill recently," he said, "and I am weak."

"You must have rest," Mrs. Ross said gently; "and we are excellent nurses—are we not, Edith?"

"Let me look at you, Edith," her father said hastily. "I can scarcely realise that this is the little curly-headed girl I left. Yet it is a long time—a long time."

"You have travelled far, I presume?" Mrs. Ross said.

"Yes, yes," very hastily. "Never long in one place—never long in one place."

"But you will not leave home again," Edith said, her heart yearning over his feebleness, as a true woman ever does over any weak object of love.

"Never again, I trust," was the reply. "I have come home at last, Edith. Margaret," he added, turning his haggard eyes upon Mrs. Ross, "how can I thank you for the care you have taken of the child I deserted?"

"I hope to tell you soon," was the gentle reply.

It was still many days before James Montgomery heard in what way Mrs. Ross hoped for a proof of his gratitude. He asserted that it was but adding to his debt when she begged him to remain in her house, to let Edith be her child still.

And after a long discussion it was so arranged, a suite of rooms being set apart for the sole use of the new inmate.

But it soon became evident that he intended to lead a recluse life in these rooms, having a library fitted up there, where he spent all his time. Here he transacted his business, which consisted of a voluminous correspondence with estate agents, and such men as are ever ready to propose profitable investments to the possessors of wealth. Here he welcomed Edith, the only sunshine of his solitary life, and learnt to lavish upon her a love but little short of positive idolatry.

Finding she had not been introduced to Society, he pleaded for a magnificent entertainment, and spent money lavishly on the occasion. Her dress, he insisted, should be of rarest lace over glistening satin, and he drove himself to the jeweller's to purchase a parure of pearls.

Yet on the evening when the drawing-rooms were filled with guests he did not appear.

"I am not strong enough," he pleaded, looking fondly at his beautiful child, in her exquisite dress. "You must not expect me to join in such festivities.'

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And Edith was forced to be content.

In the year that followed, all sorts of stories were current in Society regarding this sudden return of James Montgomery, the evidence of wealth betokened in his large purchases of real estate, his daughter's lavish expenditures. He had been in Australia, in California, in Africa; every gossip had a new version of his broken health and suddenly acquired wealth. A few old friends called upon him, but their visits were not returned, and gradually he was left to the seclusion he coveted.

He often refused admittance even to Edith; would refuse food for days, and be heard feebly pacing his room even during the night hours. Ever reserved, he seemed to live in an atmosphere of mystery, with an element of dread in it. He would tell nothing of those ten years of absence, and shrank so visibly from all allusion to them, that Edith at length ceased to refer in the most distant manner to his supposed travels.

Clear and stern came the voice of Guy: "This time it is no ghost!"

During this year of gaiety that was Edith's introduction to Society, a new happiness came into her life—the happiness that wakes in all young hearts when first they learn that there is one other of all the busy world who is learning the sweet lesson of love with their own faces for inspiration.

Not all at once is the lesson learnt. Not at first did Edith suspect the page was opening for her. Yet on the first evening that Guy Stevens bowed over her little gloved hand she knew that his face had an attraction all its own for her.

It was nearly a year after her father's return, when the winter gaieties were yet new, and gossip had heralded this newcomer. He was a young Australian, possessed of wealth almost fabulous, travelling for pleasure, and bringing letters that proved his right of entrance to the most exclusive circles of the fashionable world.

He was a very handsome man, with clear, olive complexion, and blackest of hair and eyes. From the moment of his introduction to Edith he paid her marked attention, and Edith found that no courtesies of all she had received had ever seemed so pleasant to her as those this stranger offered.

She dreamt of the dark eyes, the deep, rich voice, the graceful manner of Guy Stevens, and then, for many days, forgot his existence. For, the next morning, going to her father's library, Edith found him senseless upon the floor, a newspaper grasped in his hand, and for ten days his life hung upon a thread.

The doctors gave the attack a long name. Aunt Margaret and Edith nursed the invalid tenderly, and no one in the household read in the newspaper they loosened from his clutch this paragraph:

"*One thousand pounds reward for any information leading to the present address of a man known as the 'Hermit,' for ten years a resident in a lonely hut upon a point on the Scottish coast called Sea Gull Rock. This man, tall, emaciated, with black hair and eyes, disappeared suddenly on the night of September 17th, 1901, during a violent storm. Any information leading to his present whereabouts will be rewarded as above, by applying to Messrs. Harris and Harris, Queen Victoria Street.*"

Very slowly James Montgomery struggled back to life after the attack mentioned, and only to life. All vigour was gone—even the feeble interest he had taken in his child's appearance and success in Society. His books were neglected, and he would sit for hours, with his hands folded, staring into vacancy. His appetite had to be coaxed with gentle persistence before he would touch any food.

The physicians called in consultation gravely spoke of a great shock to the nervous system, recommended care and quiet, and amongst themselves decided that the life which they tried to lengthen was very near its end, and that they were powerless.

* * * * *

Spring had come before Guy Stevens spoke his love to Edith, winning the answer he coveted. The noble yet purely womanly beauty of the young maiden had captivated the fancy of the Australian, but his heart was won by the higher charm of Edith's mind, her cultivated intellect, her modestly displayed accomplishments, and admiration deepened into love, while all the best of his own manly nature appealed to her for a return. Aunt Margaret listened, well pleased, to Edith's blushing confession, for with more matured judgment she had learnt to respect and like her niece's suitor. But she became very grave as she said:

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"Your father must be persuaded now to see Mr. Stevens, Edith."

"He has refused so often. I am sure he would like Guy; yet he would not see him."

"But it is different now. You cannot betroth yourself to a man who is a stranger to your father, or without his consent. So I will speak myself to James."

Expecting some objections, or, perhaps, only the feeble refusal that had met all attempts to draw him from his seclusion, Mrs. Ross went to the library, where her brother-in-law sat, listlessly idle, apparently watching a fly upon his writing-table. Very gently Mrs. Ross introduced her errand, and in a moment the invalid started into unexpected animation.

"Marry Edith? Take her to a new country, away from here?"

"Not yet, James. There will be some months before we can let her go."

"No, let her marry him now—to-day, go away where she can never hear—never—— There, there, Margaret. I cannot talk. Let her marry him."

"But, James," said the bewildered woman, "you will see him first."

"Yes, if I must." He spoke wearily, as if the sudden burst of animation had utterly tired him. "Is he here?"

"He will come this morning. May I bring him here?"

"Yes, yes; have it over quickly. Anything for Edith."

"Anything for Edith! And yet you are willing to have her go away from you."

"I shall go a long journey soon, Margaret, and she will be far from here."

Perplexed beyond description, Margaret Ross went again to Edith, her only solution of this strange interview being that the sudden illness from which Mr. Montgomery was recovering had shaken his reason. She spared Edith a description of her father's words or manner, only saying he would see Mr. Stevens when he called.

"Then I will go to my father, and you can send Guy to the library when he comes," said Edith, rising as she spoke, and her aunt said no word to detain her.

Edith found her father much as her aunt had found him, seated in the apathetic silence that had become habitual to him. She drew a low chair to his feet, and while he gently caressed her hair, and her hands folded upon his knees, she told him of her lover in the sweet light of her own loving thoughts. Often she thought he did not hear her, his eyes seemingly fixed on vacancy, his thoughts far away, but if the melodious ripple of her voice ceased, he said gently:

"Tell me more of your lover, Edith. Let me be sure I am giving you your heart's desire. Tell me you love him."

And while Edith unfolded all her maiden dreams to her father's loving gentleness, Mrs. Ross, in the drawing-room, was listening to Guy Stevens.

In frank, manly words he had urged his suit, sure of her sympathy. But while he spoke he unfolded to her a secret she had never guessed.

"You may judge how engrossing my love is," he said to her, "when I tell you that for Edith's sake I shall abandon entirely the purpose on which I left Scotland. And yet I can scarcely believe myself that I can give up my purposed revenge."

"Revenge!" was the startled repetition.

"Revenge!" repeated Mr. Stevens. "I do not look like the ghost of a murdered man, Mrs. Ross, but I assure you I came here to seek a man who robbed, and to all intents, murdered me."

"But how?"

"I will tell you. When my father died, nearly two years ago, he left me, in addition to the family estate and the income from other investments, a valuable collection of diamonds, the accumulation of which had been the labour of a lifetime. Every one of these gems was of the purest water, and they were all of valuable size. Not inheriting my father's love of the stones themselves, and wishing to visit England, I determined to bring them to London and sell them. I sailed in the *Castilian* in August, 1901, and after a safe voyage of many days, we were overtaken by a storm and drifted out of our course. We struck upon the rocks on the coast of Scotland, and I must have been thrown ashore by the waves. About my waist was a belt of soft leather, in which my diamonds were securely stitched. I was senseless before I had been long in the water, and wakened to life in a rude room, lying upon a bed, with the sting of raw spirits on my lips. I sat up, to see a table with two candles, and between them a man, ripping open my belt of diamonds. I spoke, and in a moment the man sprang up, and, seizing his chair, brought it crashing down upon my head."

"Horrible!"

"He must have thrown me back into the sea, which washed me again ashore, to be revived by some fishermen, who nursed me through a delirious fever back to life and health."

"But the murderer?"

"As soon as I was reasonable I inquired about the people round me, and was soon satisfied that I had been robbed by a man they called the 'hermit,' who had lived a lonely life in a wretched hut, just outside the cluster of the fishermen's huts where I lay ill. He had disappeared on the night of the storm, and was supposed to be drowned. As soon as I was strong enough I visited his hut, and every doubt I might have felt before vanished when I recognised the room in which I had seen the robber counting his gains."

"But could you not trace him?" inquired Mrs. Ross.

"I have given the detectives here his description, have had the steamers watched, have advertised him; but he has vanished as if the waves, indeed, had swallowed him up. Probably he escaped to America. But if he ever crosses my path I will be revenged for that cowardly blow."

A few moments more of friendly converse followed; then Guy Stevens took courteous leave of Mrs. Ross to seek Mr. Montgomery in the library. He entered the sitting-room adjoining the library unannounced, and crossed upon the thick carpet unheard. Edith was still seated at her father's feet, when, looking into his face, she saw come upon it an appalling look of horror. The jaw fell, the pallor became grey, the eyes were distended, and the whole face grew rigid.

With a cry the girl sprang to her feet, to see Guy standing in the doorway.

"He is ill! My father is ill!" Edith cried. "Ring for the servants to send for a doctor."

"Loosen his necktie, and bring some water," was the reply; and even in her terror Edith wondered at the stern ring in her lover's voice. But she followed his directions, loosening the collar, bathing the face of the invalid, till, with a shivering moan, he closed the horribly dilated eyes, and sank back into the chair.

"Father, dear father!" she said then—"what is it?"

"A ghost, child," he whispered. "It comes often in my dreams; never before when I was awake."

"This time it is no ghost."

Clear and stern the voice of Guy rang out in the room as he stepped in front of the chair. But James Montgomery did not lose consciousness again, struggling to his feet, crying:

"Wait, only a moment! Go, Edith, go! I will call you if I need you. Go, child, go!"

The agony of appeal in his voice could not be resisted, and Edith left him, though she waited in the hall for any call he might make

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"Spare her!" the old man cried, sinking upon his knees, and lifting his shaking hands—"spare her! Take all, take my life, but spare Edith!"

He fell, a mere helpless mass, upon the floor, as he finished his appeal, and the man who had vowed bitterest vengeance upon his would-be murderer bent over him now with womanly tenderness. It was so plainly evident that God's vengeance had overtaken James Montgomery, that the man he had wronged stood powerless before that Mightier Hand. He lifted the slight form in his strong arms and placed it upon a wide sofa, wondering even then if remorse alone had so aged and wrecked the man he had last seen vigorous and strong, with hair unstreaked in its raven hue, and eyes full of burning fire. Yet he knew that it was this man, and no other, who had stricken him down and thrown him into the sea to die, How easily he could take his revenge! Not only would one grasp of his strong hand end the frail life, but he could doom his enemy to lingering torture through Edith. A heavenly smile came upon the lips of Guy Stevens as he looked into the unconscious face—so pathetic in its still pallor.

"For Edith's sake!" he murmured, as he wet his hand and passed it over James Montgomery's brow.

It was a long swoon—so long that more than once Guy Stevens bent his ear to the heart of the still figure, to be sure he had not already been the unconscious executioner of the man he had sought for nearly two years. But at last, with a long, sighing inspiration, James Montgomery opened his eyes.

Above him hung the dark, handsome face that had haunted his dreams for many weary months. And in that face there was no anger, no revengeful animosity—only a pity unutterable.

"I was mad!" the old man whispered. "One hour later I would have given my life freely to know I was not a murderer. You could not desire a deeper vengeance than my life has been since that night."

"I see you have suffered," was the gentle answer.

"Ah, you can never know. I am glad it is over. You will have no trouble, for I will confess whenever you wish. Only"—and here the words came with feverish rapidity, and the trembling hands were lifted imploringly—"I have a child, a daughter. She has no share in my crime. If you could spare her the knowledge that her father is the wretch you know him, I will bless you, even if you exact my very life!"

"Do you know who I am?"

"The man who was washed ashore at Sea Gull Rock."

"Guy Stevens."

"Edith's lover! Oh, my child, my child!"

"Hush! I am Edith's lover, as you say. I ask no prouder title than that. And because I love Edith I would spare her all pain as eagerly as you would."

"May Heaven bless you! It is all yours. I will sign any paper you will write to give you back your own; but you will spare Edith!"

"I have said so."

But even as he spoke Guy Stevens knew that a grief he could not avert must come to his betrothed. Over the face so worn with remorse and suffering was creeping that change which comes but once in a human life. Already the staring eyes were becoming blank, as the Australian lifted his voice and called:

"Edith—Edith!"

Rightly he guessed she would not be far away, and as she answered his call he advanced to meet her.

"Keep calm, my beloved!" he said. "Your father is very ill."

"Dying?" she whispered huskily.

He let her pass him then, to read her answer in the face of her father. And as she knelt beside the sofa, pleading for one word, one look, Guy Stevens rang the bell, sent for a physician and Mrs. Ross, and took a calm control of the situation.

Mrs. Ross came hurriedly, but Edith never stirred from her place, hoping wildly for one farewell glance or word.

The laboured breath grew shorter, the grey shadows deepened on the wan face, but at last the large, dark eyes opened.

"Edith!" the dying voice whispered faintly.

"I am here, father."

"Where is he?"

"Guy?"

"Yes, let me see him."

"I am here," said Guy, bending over Edith.

"Edith, give—him—true—love—truth, faith! God bless you both. God bless him!"

So he died. Only one man ever knew the secret over which his grave closed, and he never spoke the cruel words that would have betrayed his knowledge, ever guarding the ghastly horror in his own heart for the sake of Edith, his wife.

Herbert Cullen.

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Compounding a Felony.

Telling how a Girl Played the Part of a Detective, and afterwards that of Barrister for the Defence.

Eric Charteris sat smoking a cigar in his modest lodgings in Gray's Inn. He was a pleasant-faced fellow of five-and-twenty, and his position, though in keeping with his lodgings, was ample for his wants. Steady, upright, genial, generous, it was small wonder that everyone who knew him liked Eric Charteris.

There was a tap at the door, and his landlady announced a visitor. A moment later Gerald Whitcombe, the husband of his sister Rose, stepped into the room and took a seat by the table.

Eric opened his eyes in genuine surprise. It was seldom that his brother-in-law favoured him with a visit. And, as he now regarded him, his surprise deepened.

The face of Gerald Whitcombe was pale and haggard, and his eyes had in them a frightened, hunted look that caused Eric some inward uneasiness.

"What's up?" he asked quickly. "Anything the matter with Rose or the child?"

Gerald Whitcombe fidgeted uneasily in his seat.

"No," he replied nervously. "But—but there will be before long."

Eric started.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Come—out with it!"

Gerald rose and hurriedly paced the floor of the room. Then he stopped suddenly, and, with his face averted, said:

"I'm in a terrible mess, Eric. You were right when you criticised my too expensive tastes, though I forbade you the house in consequence of such utterance of an unpleasant truth. And now these same expensive tastes have landed me in the clutch of the law. To-morrow will probably be my last day of liberty. The next day I shall be arrested."

He stopped. Eric never spoke—only waited for him to proceed. The silence seemed to add to Gerald Whitcombe's nervousness.

"I suppose I'd better tell the whole miserable story," went on the latter shamefacedly. "I had a friend—or I thought him such until recently—and, in a weak moment, I put my name to a deed of surety for him to the tune of fifty pounds.

"A month later he decamped, leaving me to face the music as best I could. I hadn't so much as five, let alone fifty pounds, but that tale isn't worth much in such a crisis. So I—I made a false entry in one of the books of the firm who employ me, and—and borrowed the money."

"Borrowed!" echoed Eric. There was just the faintest indication of a sneer in his tone.

Gerald Whitcombe flushed.

"Yes, borrowed," he repeated defiantly. "I'm not a wilful thief, Eric Charteris. Look here!"

He drew from his breast-pocket a small paper packet. Opening it, he displayed a ten-pound note and eight sovereigns.

"I was never a saving man," he protested. "But since I took that fifty pounds, I've pinched and scraped till I've got together these eighteen with which to pay back what I took. Ah, that surprises you, doesn't it? You didn't think it was in me."

"I did not," replied Eric honestly. "I was wrong. I beg your pardon."

Gerald Whitcombe looked up. But Eric was not sneering now.

"Is there any more to tell?" he asked quietly.

"Yes. Had things gone on in their usual way I could have raised the fifty pounds in time to put the entry straight before the half-yearly audit. But something or other has gone wrong—none of us know exactly what—and the books have this afternoon been given over to the accountants for a special audit. Even if I had the money to-night, I could do nothing to stop what is now inevitable."

"Then it is useless for me to advance the money?"

"I'm afraid so. Wilmot Brothers are business men, and the mere repayment of the money would, I fear, not content them."

There was silence for some moments. And then Eric asked:

"Does Rose know?"

"Yes."

It was late when Gerald Whitcombe took his departure. And ere he left, he had agreed to a plan which Eric Charteris had proposed.

* * * * *

Gabriel Wilmot, sole surviving partner in the firm of Wilmot Brothers, returned to his house the following afternoon in a state of great perturbation.

"Whatever is the matter?" asked his daughter Alma. "You look worried to death."

"So I am," ejaculated Mr. Wilmot savagely. "There's a defalcation in one of the books to the amount of fifty pounds, and the clerk who had charge of the book hasn't turned up to-day. I sent round to his house, but the beggar's sloped. It's as plain as a pikestaff!"

"Oh, daddie! What are you going to do? Is—is he a married man?"

"Yes, he's a married man, with one little girl—at least, that is what I learnt from the man I sent round. I can't make it out. His salary wasn't bad, as salaries go, and the fellow seemed a decent sort. I don't know what to do. I suppose I shall have to notify the police of the fact."

Gabriel Wilmot sighed. It was the first time in all his business career that such a step had been forced upon him.

"Daddie," said Alma, coming over to his chair and laying a little hand caressingly on his shoulder, "don't be in a hurry, dear. Find out *why* he did it."

"How can I?" responded the old man irritably.

"Then let me."

"You!"

Gabriel Wilmot gazed at his daughter in stupefied astonishment. But Alma never flinched.

"Yes, me," she repeated boldly. "You always said I was cut out for a detective. Why not put it to the test now? If there should be extenuating circumstances in the case, you will be glad you did not call in the aid of the police. If there be none—which I doubt—or if I fail—which I doubt still more—it will be time enough to communicate then with the proper authorities. In all probability the man has left London. I have been wanting a holiday for some time, but the country lacks interest this time of year. This little business will just fill up the blank and save me from ennui."

Gabriel Wilmot was only half convinced.

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"But think of the example to the other clerks!" he protested.

"Bother the example!" said Alma decisively. "That's the excuse of a flint-heart. You needn't tell the others anything about the loss, and, if they don't know, where's the need of example?"

There was sound reason in this. But the old man was still dissatisfied.

"But you'll never find him!" he protested weakly. "You've had no ex——" But the look he got effectually stopped him.

"Don't you trouble your old head about that," replied his daughter scornfully. "I know what I'm about, and shall take care not to bungle the business. You leave it to me. Now tell me all you know about the man—what his name is, where he lived, and what he looks like."

There was no help for it. It was his daughter's way to treat him like this. And, to tell the truth, her "way" generally turned out to be the right one in the end. So he gave her all the information in his power and reluctantly promised to keep the matter a secret for three or four weeks.

"That's right!" she said, as she kissed his troubled face. "Now come and have some tea, and I'll sit with you all the evening. To-morrow will be soon enough to begin work."

* * * * * *

It was a delightful day. The air was fresh—for it was not yet summer—and the blue sky was innocent of a cloud. A man was sitting on the beach, in the shelter of a great groyne that jutted out into the sea. A book was in his hand, and a little girl of five frolicked merrily round him. From time to time she attracted his attention by her clamouring insistence, but more often she was unsuccessful, for the volume in his hand absorbed and interested him. He was on the lee of the groyne, the tide flowing towards its opposite side, where the water was deep. Above his head rose the great stone barrier, skirted by the huge square timbers, slimy with sea-moss, which form so well-known a feature of most south-coast summer resorts. Presently the child looked up at the great groyne above her head.

"Put me wight up there," she pleaded. "I wants to sit on the edge and look down at you."

The man took her on his back, and, mounting the great timbers, set her on the top of the groyne.

"Don't move, Kitty," he commanded, as he again leapt down to the beach. "Sit quite still and tell me when you are tired."

"All wight," responded the child. "I'll wemember."

Once more the man took up his book, while the child, looking down at him from her pinnacle, began singing softly to herself.

"There's a nice lady coming this way," she observed presently, pausing in her song.

But the man never heard. The book had claimed him once more. How long they remained thus he never knew, but he was suddenly startled by hearing a cry from the child above him. Dropping his book, he looked up. Kitty was on her feet now, a look of terror in her eyes.

"Oh!" she screamed excitedly. "The nice lady's tumbled wight in the water!"

For a moment the man failed to comprehend. But a second scream—not a child's this time, but a woman's—made him spring suddenly to his feet. In an instant he was on the top of the great groyne. A girl was struggling helplessly in the blue water below. He was the only person in sight, and, as the sinking girl saw him, she cried piteously to him to save her.

"Stop there!" he shouted peremptorily to the child. "Don't move!"

Another instant and his coat was off. With a quick bound he was in the water. A dozen rapid strokes and the girl was in his arms.

"All right!" he said. "Keep cool; you're quite safe now."

She gave a gasping little sob and ceased struggling, while the man slowly swam with her to shore.

"Oh!" she sobbed, as she sank down on the beach, "you have saved my life! How can I ever thank you! My foot slipped on the groyne. Oh, thank God you were here!"

"I shouldn't have been of much service, had it not been for the child," he said, shaking the water from his clothes. "It was she who saw you."

* * * * * *

It was a week later. That great black groyne seemed to possess some subtle fascination for two young people. The man with the book had a companion now, and the companion seemed entirely to have eclipsed the book. Only a week! Yet many wonderful things happen in a week. And this was nothing very wonderful, after all. Love at first sight?

She gave a gasping little sob, and ceased struggling. Eric swam slowly with her to the shore.

Well, it may be so. But, at any rate, here they were—rescuer and rescued—with their hands suspiciously close together, with the forsaken book artfully arranged so as to conceal the fact.

"It beats me," said the man, "how on earth you come to be down here alone. I'm afraid you're a spoilt daughter! If I were your father——"

"Father, indeed!"

"Well, yes—it's better as it is, isn't it?" he admitted, with a twinkle.

"Much!" assented the girl archly.

There was a curious and quite unaccountable movement about that book. And the girl said:

"Don't!"

There was silence for a moment or two, and then she added: "I don't know what dad will say!"

"Oh, never mind him," responded the man. "I'll manage him all right as soon as I get back to town."

"When will that be?" inquired the girl.

"I—I don't know. When will you?"

"I don't know, either."

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Their eyes met.

"Seems as if we've got *one* secret," commented the man. I can't tell you mine—yet."

"Neither can I."

The man laughed.

"Well, it doesn't matter," he said. "We can trust each other, can't we?"

* * * * *

It was three days later. Alma Wilmot had searched the little seaside town with praiseworthy persistence. And at last she had discovered the present whereabouts of Mr. and Mrs. Whitcombe. At the outset, she had been somewhat surprised to find that the absconding clerk had been so careless of his liberty as to leave behind him the name of the town to which he had removed. But the town was one thing and the street and number were another. It had taken her almost a fortnight to find out the house that sheltered Mr. and Mrs. Whitcombe. The question now was—should she go straight to the house and confront him with the crime? At last she decided to do so.

The door was opened by a quiet, sweet-faced young woman.

"Is Mr. Whitcombe in?" inquired Alma briefly.

The woman nodded, smiled, and ushered her into a cosy little sitting-room. A man rose as she entered, and, as she saw him, Alma gave a little gasp of astonishment.

"Eric!" she exclaimed. "You here! I—I asked for Mr. Whitcombe!"

Eric Charteris smiled.

"I am Mr. Whitcombe—*pro tem.*" he said, laughing.

"I thought your name was Charteris?"

"So it is," responded Eric promptly. "I see I must explain. But tell me—what do *you* want with Mr. Whitcombe?"

And then Alma sat down, still bewildered, and told him who she was and why she had come to the town. Eric listened in blank amazement.

"You—a detective!" he gasped, and laughed again. "Well, now I must tell you my story. Gerald Whitcombe is the husband of my sister Rose and the father of Kitty. The night before the discovery of the—er—little clerical error in his books, he came to me and told me all. It was a sad story, and I pitied the man. Moreover, I could see he was deeply penitent. I decided at once that he must be got out of the country. But there was little time.

"The officers of Scotland Yard think little of a twenty-four hours' start, and I cast about for some means of putting them off the scent and thereby gaining time. So early the next morning the Whitcombes moved from London, leaving the name of this town behind them. As soon as they were safe out of the district, I took the place and adopted the name of Gerald Whitcombe, while he slipped off to the Continent. Since then, I have been waiting for the arrival of the detectives. And, instead, I find you."

"But the detective might have arrested you!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no," was the reply. "I should have explained, and then I would have gone to Mr. Wilmot, offered him the money, and begged his forgiveness for my sister's husband."

"And now?" asked Alma.

"Now," replied Eric confidently, "I shall have a good backer-up in my pleading. You have played the detective. Now you must be barrister for the defence."

"Oh!" said Alma. "And why?"

"For two very excellent reasons," replied Eric. "First, because you are engaged to the brother-in-law of Gerald Whitcombe, and, secondly, because, but for his daughter, his little Kitty, you might have perished in the sea ten days ago. Surely your father cannot resist such pleading!"

"He'll do just what I tell him!" affirmed Alma,

And he did.

Walter J. Mowbray.

The Mystery of Dobson's Wife.

And How it was Cleared Up.

"A letter for you, John, and I really can't make out who it can be from," said my wife, as she took her seat at the breakfast-table one morning two or three months ago.

"The postmark is Kingston. Who on earth do we know at Kingston?" she continued, as, womanlike, she held the letter first this way, and then that, in a vain endeavour to find out who was the sender.

"If you'll allow me, my dear, I'll open it," I replied; "I may then possibly be enabled to gratify your curiosity."

The epistle in question was from an old friend whom I had not seen for years, and the contents I must confess, caused me some surprise. They were as follows:

"*Rose Cottage, Kingston.*

"Dear Robertson,—*Having recently taken unto myself a wife, and settled down for good, I think it time we should renew our old acquaintance. I shall be very pleased, therefore, to see you and your wife at dinner on Monday next* (6.30 *sharp*), *on the occasion of my wife's tenth birthday.—Yours sincerely,*

"W. Dobson."

"'On the occasion of my wife's *tenth* birthday'!" Surely Dobson must have made a mistake. I read the letter over again. Yes, there were the words, written plainly enough—"my wife's *tenth* birthday!"

"Whom is it from, and what are you looking so astonished about?" inquired my wife impatiently.

"Read it," I replied laconically, handing the missive across to her.

"Oh, John, he must have made a mistake!" exclaimed my wife when she had finished the perusal of the letter. "He meant her twentieth—or more likely her thirtieth birthday, as I'm sure he must be over forty. Shall you go? Why, I didn't know he was married—did you?"

"Well, yes. Jackson told me a few days ago. By the way, I may as well look Jackson up; his office isn't far from mine; he may have met Mrs. Dobson, and will no doubt be able to set us right as to her age. By Jove! won't I chaff old Dobson about this on Monday!"

"Oh, yes, do, John; mind you ask him all about her. I should so like to know what sort of a person she is. There's the 'bus coming; let me help you on with your coat. Good-bye! Don't forget to bring the note-paper from Laker's, and ask the price of that brown bag, and——"

The rest of the sentence was lost to me, as I rushed down the steps and took my place on the 'bus bound for the City.

About mid-day, during the interval allowed for lunch, I met Jackson.

"Hallo, old fellow, how are you? I was just coming round to see you," he exclaimed as he shook my hand. "I received a letter from Dobson this morning that I wished to show you."

"Why, I was coming round to you on the same errand. I have a letter from him that I wanted to show you."

"Is it an invitation to spend the evening on the occasion of his wife's tenth birthday?"

"Yes." And on comparing the letters we had received we found they were nearly identical.

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"I came to the conclusion he had made a mistake," I said, "and as I thought it possible you might have seen his wife——"

"Never seen the lady," interrupted Jackson. "Can't make it out; he can scarcely have made a mistake in both letters; and yet it's impossible that he can have married a child only ten years of age. True, he has travelled a great deal in the East, and may have imbibed some Eastern notions. Perhaps he's brought home a 'dusky bride.'"

"Maybe," I replied, "though from what I remember of Dobson, he hadn't a very high opinion of the inhabitants of Oriental countries. Do you intend to go?"

"I think so. However, if you and Mrs. Robertson will call round at my place this evening, we'll talk the matter over. Until then, *au reservoir*, as we say in the classics. My time's up; I must be off. Wednesday will solve the mystery;" and, waving his hand in a melodramatic manner, Jackson hastened up Chancery Lane.

On "talking the matter over" that evening at Jackson's house, an old aunt of his, who was staying there, and had not been invited to the Dobsons', decided that it would be very improper for us to go.

"You surely couldn't think of going, my dear," she said, turning to Mrs. Jackson. "The girl's parents surely can't be alive, or they would never have allowed such a disgraceful thing to take place."

"But he may have brought home a young Turkish lady, or possibly a Hindoo girl," suggested Jackson; "you know in those countries they marry at a very early age."

"All the more reason that you shouldn't go," replied his aunt; "those Eastern women have no idea of morality at all; and if Mr. Dobson chooses to place himself on a level with heathens, and adopt their customs, he can't expect decent respectable people to visit him."

"It is possible that a Hindoo or Turkish woman may have just as much claim to be called a lady as many an Englishwoman—more than some, perhaps, who are received every day in respectable society," I remarked; "though that of course would not justify Dobson's conduct in marrying a girl of such tender years; still, we ought not to condemn him until we know the facts of the case, so I vote that we accept his invitation."

But Jackson's aunt declined to listen to our arguments, and indeed the other ladies seemed at first inclined to take her view of the matter; ultimately, however, feminine curiosity prevailed, and it was decided that we should go, although the aunt still expressed her conviction that it was "highly improper."

* * * * *

On Wednesday, punctual to the time appointed—indeed, a little before it—Mr. and Mrs. Jackson, my wife and self, stood on the steps leading to the front door of Rose Cottage, and announced our presence by ringing the visitors' bell. A neat little maid-servant answered our summons, and ushered us into a prettily-furnished room, with French-windows opening on to a lawn at the back of the house. With a remark to the effect that she would let her mistress know of our arrival, the trim little servant disappeared.

Her mistress! She spoke of her as any ordinary servant would speak of an ordinary every-day mistress. But then, no doubt, that was because she was used to her.

But speculation was rife in that back room of Rose Cottage, and expectations ran high. There was nothing Oriental that we could see about the furniture, which was of the ordinary type one usually finds in English homes of the well-to-do classes. Moreover, a very English-looking bonnet was resting on a small table in a corner of the room.

"Of course she has adopted the European style of dress, my dear," said my wife.

"I think I should have preferred to have seen her in her native costume, if she is an Eastern lady," remarked Jackson.

Mrs. Jackson turned sharply upon her husband.

"If she is, Thomas! Surely you don't suppose I should have come here had I imagined his wife was an English gir of such tender years? Besides, it would not be permitted——"

"Hush! There's someone coming down the garden."

All eyes were at once turned eagerly in that direction, just in time to catch a glimpse of a very pretty and graceful girl clad in white, and apparently of about fourteen or fifteen years of age. Masses of dark hair fell loosely over her shoulders, but her skin was as fair as ours. She was certainly not a Hindoo, nor was there anything Oriental in her appearance. There was, in fact, a decidedly English look about her.

"I suppose that is his wife," said Jackson, "though she looks rather more than ten years old!"

"Perhaps she's tall for her age," remarked my wife.

"And I'm sure she's English," exclaimed Mrs. Jackson. "I really don't think we ought to remain."

Further conversation was, however, cut short by the entrance of Dobson and the young lady in question.

The ladies of our party drew themselves up stiffly, their skirts rustling ominously.

"Ah, I'm awfully glad to see you all," said Dobson cheerily, shaking hands all round, "it seems ages since we last met, doesn't it?" Then turning to the young girl in white, "Allow me to introduce my niece, Miss Bradley."

Not his wife after all! Was he ashamed to present her to us? He certainly hadn't mentioned her, though I must say he seemed quite at his ease. I wondered in my own mind whether he had so far adopted the customs of the Orientals as to keep her shut up altogether and out of sight.

Conversation was being carried on in a constrained sort of manner, on our side at all events; when it was again interrupted by the entrance of a pleasant-looking, stoutish lady of about forty summers.

"Why, Martha, what a time you've been!" exclaimed Dobson. "I thought you were never coming. Let me introduce you. Mrs. Robertson, my *wife!*"

His *wife!* The ceremony of introduction was proceeded with, and I bowed in a bewildered sort of way when it came to my turn, and murmured something about "extreme pleasure—wife of such an old friend," and so on.

Dobson, seeing our looks of surprise, said:

"Why, what's the matter? You will pardon me for remarking it, but really you all seem to be in such a state of astonishment——"

"Well, the fact is," broke in Jackson, "we have been labouring under a delusion, in consequence of a mistake you made in your letters of invitation."

"What mistake?" asked Dobson, looking surprised in his turn.

"Why, you said something about this being your wife's tenth birthday, and——"

"And you imagined I had married a girl only ten years of age!" interrupted Dobson, roaring with laughter. "Thanks, I prefer a lady of maturer years and greater experience in the management of a household. I thought you would have guessed. Don't you know that to-day is the twenty-ninth of February, and this is leap year? It is my wife's tenth birthday, as of course it can only take place every fourth year."

Strange to say, this solution of the mystery surrounding "Dobson's wife" had occurred to none of us, and we were all very much surprised that we had not thought of it before. However, we spent a very pleasant evening, and Mrs. Dobson laughed heartily when we told her how we had been speculating as to whether she would appear in Oriental or English costume, and the arguments we had respecting her nationality.

The scruples even of Jackson's aunt were satisfied when she heard the account of our visit the next day, although that worthy old lady expressed it as her opinion "that it was very stupid of Mr. Dobson not to have worded his letter like any ordinary mortal!"

A. G. Price.

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The Result.

She: "They say there are microbes in kisses." He: "Nonsense. What dangerous disease do they develop into?" She: "Marriage, sometimes."

She was Fishing.

She: "Have you ever formed any idea of what an angel really looks like?" He (after some deliberation): "No, I don't believe I have." It was curious how shortly after this his visit terminated.

He was Pleased.

"Yes," said the wife's mother, "I see it was a mistake for my daughter to marry you at all. She is just as different from you in every respect as she can be." "Well, well," replied the great brute, "how you flatter me!"

She Returned Them.

She (tearfully): "Henry, our engagement is at an end, and I wish to return to you everything you have ever given me." He (cheerfully): "Thanks, Blanche! You may begin at once with the kisses!" They are married now.

A Lovers' Quarrel.

She (turning to the door): "I think you are just hateful, and I'm never going to speak to you again; so there's no use coming into the drawing-room after me—because I'll be on the rustic seat at the far end of the conservatory."

How Ungallant!

Miss Ratherold (who has just received a proposal): "But, Major, don't you think there is too much difference in our ages?" Major Sharpshooter: "No, indeed! I'm a great deal older than I look, my dear Miss Ratherold."

A Necessity.

George: "Are you ready to live on my income, dear? Maud: "Certainly, dearest, if—if——" George: "If what?" Maud: "If you can get another one for yourself." George: "Another?" Maud: "Yes; another income."

And He Kissed Her.

"Frank," said a girl to her lover, "here's a piece in the paper headed Kismet. What does Kismet mean?" "The word must be pronounced with the 't' silent, Nettie," replied Frank. "Why, that would be 'Kiss me,'" said Nettie. "With the greatest pleasure," answered Frank, as he did so.

Then the Band Played.

It was in a suburban drawing-room that the following conversation is reported to have been overheard. Said the young man who was calling: "Mary, you are the only girl I ever really and truly loved." "Oh, Will," said his companion, "you said the same very thing to that Jones girl only last week. She told me so." "True," answered Will unblushingly, "but that was only a dress rehearsal. This is the first performance."

The Mean Thing.

She: "Yes, dearest, I made this cake all alone." He: "I can't believe it. Somebody must, at least, have helped you to lift it out of the oven."

The Difference.

She: "You were not so dissipated before we were married." He: "Indeed I was, my dear, but when anyone told you so then, you wouldn't believe it."

What Father Thought.

Willie: "Papa is going to let you marry my sister." Featherstone: "How do you know?" Willie: "He said it was better than nothing, after all."

Then the Sun Froze.

Gussie (gleefully): "Bah Jove! All the girls round here smile at me." Tom: "Well, that shows they have some manners. Anywhere else they would laugh outright."

The Unromantic Maiden.

"Dearest Laura, since it is not permitted us to live together, let us together plunge into the river." "But, Arthur, what are you thinking of? I don't know how to swim?"

Quite Provoking.

"We had planned an ideal life; love in a cottage and all that, you know." "Well, why did you not carry it out?" "The man who owned the cottage insisted on having the rent in advance."

Through Sheer Spite.

Mr. Batch: "You say you are going to let your daughter marry young Hobson. But I thought you had a grudge against Hobson?" Mr. Henpeck: "So I have. That's why I want him to have my wife for a mother-in-law."

A Difference.

The Widow: "Yes, Mr. Gibbs proposed last night; but when I thought of poor dear Charles I refused—absolutely refused—to marry again——" Friend: "Indeed?" The Widow: "To marry again before the year was out."

A Fact.

"Like the rest of my sex," said the mermaid, "I suppose I open my mouth a good deal, but——" "But what?" interrupted the lobster. "I never put my foot in it," continued the belle of the sea, as she plunged into the surf.

A Pitiable Mistake.

"I didn't know Miss Passay was interested in chemical matters." "She isn't, that I know of." "Well, I saw her pay a shilling yesterday for a book on the 'Best Methods of Filtration.'" "Yes, poor old girl. She thought it was 'Flirtation.'"

The Prologue.

Pat was a bashful lover, and Biddy was coy, but not too coy. "Biddy," Pat began, timidly, "did ye ivver think of marryin'?" "Sure, now, th' subject has nivver entered my thoughts," demurely replied Biddy. "It's sorry Oi am," said Pat, turning away. "Wan minute, Pat!" called Biddy, softly. "Ye've set me a-thinkin'."

No Need for Argument.

"Put yourself in my place, young man. Would you want your only daughter to marry a penniless youth?" "Put yourself in my place, sir. Would you want to remain a penniless youth when there were rich men's daughters to marry?" "You confess that you'd marry my child simply for her father's wealth?" "And you confess that you withhold her from me simply because of my poverty?" "What other reason do I need?" "What other reason could influence you?" "This talk is quite useless." "Quite." "We have nothing to gain by it." "Absolutely nothing." "You take it philosophically." "Why shouldn't I? Your daughter and I were quietly married a month ago." "Good gracious!"

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

"She is your Mother!"

Deacon grinned. "Yes—you understand that, don't you? So come along and take this medicine!"

He seized the trembling creature roughly by the arm, and tried to force the glass to her lips. She uttered a low cry of terror like that of an animal at bay, and Marcella, listening outside, flung all thought of prudence to the wind; she turned the handle, and before either Deacon or the trembling woman he was grasping had realised what had happened, she was inside the room and had dashed the glass in the man's hand to the ground.

"How dare you!" she panted, drawing the frail shrinking figure of the woman closer to her. "How dare you insult a lady in my father's house! You forget, Deacon, that you are one of the servants here. In my father's absence I am the head of the Court."

An evil smile curved the man's Oriental-looking mouth. He had recovered from the shock of seeing her in the room, but his eyes were still puzzled though his mouth smiled.

"So you've found your way down here, miss, 'ave you? I might have known that you would ferret it out sooner or later! Anyway, you'll be sorry that you've tried to interfere with me and my duty."

Marcella's face flushed hotly—the insolence of the man's manner and speech made her tingle with rage.

"You call it 'duty' to try and force an objectionable drink down a helpless, inoffensive woman's mouth?" she said hotly. "But I will not discuss the subject with you; I shall make my complaint to——" She paused suddenly. How could she safely threaten to tell Sir Cyprian of his servant's conduct, when he must surely know of it? Her father was as much against her as he was in league with his menials.

Deacon laughed insolently. "Oh, yes, miss—I am quite ready to be sent away at a moment's notice by the master. He will do exactly as you suggest, no doubt."

Marcella looked at him haughtily. She could not deny that the man was encouraged by her father in his outrageous conduct, and she saw that to continue an argument would be waste of time. "You will please leave this room while I am in it," she said coldly. "You hear?" she flashed—"I order you out of my presence."

He made a mocking bow. "I go now, miss! You shall have no cause to complain of my disobedience!" He left the room and slammed the door behind him, and Marcella heard the key turn in the lock. She was a prisoner, then! Shut in with the trembling, weak creature who had clung to her silently throughout the scene with Deacon.

"You will stay with me now?" the woman cried, her pale face upturned to the strong, self-reliant one above her. "I was longing to see you again. I have had no one with me except Dolly."

Marcella started. "Dolly," that was the name of the dead baby-sister mentioned in her mother's diary.

"How is Dolly?" she said gently.

The weak face brightened. "Oh, she is very well. I think she has grown since you last came here. But you must let me show you the pretty things in the other rooms,"

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she went on. "There are such a lot, and they let me play with them and dust them when I am good."

Marcella followed her into the inner rooms that led out of her own, and found herself in a large sort of lumber-room, full of boxes, tapestry, iron safes, and works of art. As she gazed round her eyes fell upon a life-size picture standing behind a screen, and as she looked more closely at it, she gave a cry of amazement and incredulity. Where had she seen that picture before? It was the "Mona Lisa" of Leonardo da Vinci, and surely—surely, she asked herself with a throbbing brain, it must either be the twin one to that once possessed by Mr. Johnson, the millionaire, or—and her heart stood still with a new terror—the stolen picture must be one and the same as that in her father's lumber-room!

She turned to the babbling, laughing creature by her side.

"Go and—and nurse Dolly," she said gently. "I will come after you when I—I have examined these beautiful things."

Left alone, she went down on her knees and closely examined the picture afresh with hungry, eager eyes. Yes—yes—there could be no doubt about it. She remembered having noticed a curious crack in the canvas, and that same crack was on this picture also!

"What does it mean?" she whispered. "Surely," with a low cry of terror—"he has not known of this—this fearful theft? Impossible—and yet!" She buried her face in her hands. Incidents she had long forgotten rose before her with a new significance, revealing an awful possibility to her of fresh horror and shame. She was so immersed in her thoughts that she did not hear the outer door open, and someone enter the room.

A low, amused laugh roused her. She sprang to her feet, and met the cool, blue eyes of Sir Cyprian, watching her as a cat does a mouse. "You!" she gasped. "You!"

"Yes, my dutiful child," he said in a quiet tone. "You don't seem pleased to see your father!" He went towards her, but she beat him off wildly.

"Don't come near me! I could not bear to be touched by you!" she cried. "I know—I know—why you keep this room down here—and I will tell everyone. I will let Mr. Johnson know where his picture is—and that poor mad woman, who is she? What part has she played in your cruel plans?" The hot torrent of passionate words poured from her mouth, until with panting breath she paused and made an effort to pass him.

Sir Cyprian caught her arm in a savage grip. His face was quite pale, but his sapphire blue eyes were glittering dangerously.

"So," he hissed, "that is your game, is it, my dear? You think you have outwitted me—but—but you will think better of betraying me and shouting your mad babble to the world! Shall I tell you why no one would credit any tales you told them? Why you would end in placing yourself in an asylum!" His face was close to hers now, and his hot breath on her cheek. "Because that mad woman I keep down here is an escaped lunatic; she committed numberless thefts, but was proved insane and sent to an asylum. I shelter her here because—do you want to know why?"

Marcella fell back and her eyes met the cruel, glittering ones of the man she called "father."

"Why—why?" she said hoarsely, "tell me why?"

He drew her nearer and whispered: "If you betray what you have seen down here, the world will know it—the world will know that a convicted thief and lunatic is——"

"Ah, don't tell me," she moaned—"don't tell me!"

He smiled fiendishly, and repeated: "That a convicted thief and lunatic is your—mother!"

THIRTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

The Quest of Mr. Johnson.

"Ah, Caleb, you have returned! I was afraid that something had happened to you—you have been so long away!" and Lady Violet, the financier's lovely bride, turned to greet him as he entered unannounced, one afternoon, her drawing-room at the house in Grosvenor Place. For she still maintained a separate establishment, and with the exception of her intimate relations and servants, very few knew that she had married the multi-millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson.

It was nearly a fortnight since the financier had left her so unceremoniously to search for Marcella's sweetheart, and during that time Lady Violet had received only two brief telegrams from him. She had waited and hoped for news both of Mr. Johnson and Marcella, but in spite of having written several letters to her niece, she had not heard in reply, with the exception of one or two notes, written obviously under the supervision of a third party.

The only ray of relief that had come her way was her having seen Philip Nullius so strangely at Paddington Station, and from his presence there had gathered that he had been befriended by the financier. She had also tried to find out whether he had met Mr. Johnson, but Philip had denied seeing anyone in the person of a friend. She had carefully avoided mentioning him to her brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian Rust, when he called upon her one day, though she felt in some strange way that he knew more than anyone else about the reason for the young curate's sudden disappearance. Smiling, suave, and sarcastic, the baronet had in turn failed to elicit any information from her about Mr. Johnson's absence from town when he should have been on his honeymoon. She had given Philip that brief warning to be careful without betraying that she knew he was being hounded down by the strange, bitter hate of Sir Cyprian.

It was almost with a cry of joy that she greeted the financier as he came towards her. She had sent him on her errand in a flood of passionate revulsion against the idea of a honeymoon, when the girl who was far more to her than he could ever be was unhappy in her love. Yet Lady Violet acknowledged to herself with a sensation of surprise that she was genuinely glad and relieved to see the calm, strong face of the man she had married some two weeks ago. She put her hand on his arm, and said again:

"Caleb, why don't you speak? Tell me all that has happened and how you fared while away!"

The financier smiled grimly. His face looked a trifle more cold, and in his eyes the old inscrutable expression was intensified. But his mouth trembled ever so slightly as he answered:

"I am afraid I made but a poor sort of detective—you tried me beyond my capabilities. I did all I could to—to find Marcella's sweetheart, but when I arrived at the house he had been spirited away! I did all in my power," he said, with an odd note of regret in his voice, "but it was no good—I completely botched up the whole affair. I even went so far as to lurk about the place for a day or two, then even that

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failed to bring me nearer to the object of my quest—and so "—he sighed wearily—"I came back. You are not very upset at my failure, are you?" He took her white hand gently in his and kissed it. He did not try to touch her face, she noticed, and then it struck her that his hair was just a shade more grey.

"It has been an ordeal for you, Caleb," she said; "I am sorry I asked you to go. I thought afterwards that it was not quite fair on you—you are the king of finance—but in playing the simple *role* of guardian to the afflicted you are out of your element." She smiled suddenly. "After all, you will be annoyed with me, perhaps, when you realise that it was a waste of time to have gone at all, although I sent you because it may interest you to hear that Philip Nullius has returned to Crawley."

The effect of her words upon the financier was electrical. He seized her wrists in his, unconscious of the sudden pain his grip caused her.

"What's that! Phillip Nullius alive and well! Thank God!—thank God!" and Caleb J. Johnson laughed a tremulous laugh, that, coming from a woman, might have appeared almost a hysterical one.

"Had you any reason to suppose that he would not return, then?" Lady Violet said quickly, wondering at his strange manner.

The financier looked at her with a sudden furtive glance. "Reason!" he muttered; "no, not any particular reason, except that I was afraid that—that something might have happened to him. It was a lonely place that—and one never knows."

"Well, you will be interested to hear that I met him," Lady Violet continued slowly, "and he told me that he had had some strange experiences, but that he had got out of them single-handed, and was then returning to see Marcella. I wish," she went on quickly, glancing at the stern, tired-looking face before her, "that the poor fellow's parentage was not buried in oblivion—then perhaps Sir Cyprian would not be so set against Marcella marrying him—and I can't help feeling, Caleb, that he is a gentleman in spite of his obscure birth and being brought up in a foundling hospital. It is most unfortunate for him. But Sir Cyprian hates him for some other reason."

"So Sir Cyprian is dead against him, is he?" the financier said thoughtfully, with a peculiar smile. "He objects to Philip Nullius on the score of being of ignoble birth and a penniless curate!"

"I don't understand," his bride answered slowly, "why Sir Cyprian should hate that young fellow so. He has a chance of getting on in the Church, and then Marcella being his only daughter she will have money enough; you see," she explained, "old Sir Basil Wingate, my brother-in-law's uncle, left the whole of his money to Cyprian should his only daughter Helen, whom he had disinherited for running away with an adventurer, die without a male heir who should then come into the property and title, but if, as it happened, Helen died childless the title, with the money and estate, would revert to Cyprian and his elder daughter's son, should she marry—the old man having a hatred of any feminine creature inheriting directly. But, of course, you must be bored by all this dull family history," she said quickly, seeing the financier's eyes grow absent and thoughtful. "I forgot you would wonder who everyone is."

"On the contrary, I am much interested," he said slowly, "and will see whether I can do anything for this—this young man who is such an outcast, and unfit to mate with Sir Cyprian's daughter." He laughed suddenly, and his eyes flashed with a curious light.

"You are very good, Caleb," she said gently. "Marcella's happiness is more to me than my own. I love her as though she were my own daughter, and Sir Cyprian has no right to stand in the way of her happiness—he has obtained his present position only by the fluke of an old man's bitter jealousy, and had Helen Jerningham had a son, then Sir Cyprian would never have owned the Court!" Her dark eyes flashed. "I hate him, Caleb," she whispered hoarsely. "I hate him more than I can tell you—and would kiss the hand that dragged him down!"

"Even though it were mine?" his strong hand closed on hers.

"Yes—yours would be the right hand to wield the weapon," she retorted bitterly. "You are one of us now—and—and"—she finished with a sudden shy hesitancy—"my husband."

"Your husband! Yes, I had almost forgotten I had a wife, Violet," the financier said slowly. "I seem to have lived in a dream the last few days—a dream of the past."

She looked at him curiously. He was the same, yet different, this brusquely fascinating man whom she had married against her will—yet whom she felt she would not unmarry even if she could do so. She remembered his passionate wooing when they had returned from their wedding ceremony, and she had refused to live with him—the passion seemed to have died in him during his absence, giving way to an absent moody manner that piqued her.

"Caleb," she went up to him—her lovely face within an inch of his—"you don't regret—already?"

"Regret," he laughed, and snatched her to him. "You don't know me, Violet. I cannot regret what I went out of my way to plan and bring about, but now I know you are safely my wife—mine against all the world—I am allowing other matters to be uppermost in my thoughts just now." He looked at her with a half satirical smile. "You refused to live with me until I brought you Philip Nullius alive and well—I now intend to keep on the same relations as we are at present, until I have helped Philip Nullius to reinstate himself in the world, and prove himself worthy the hand of even so beautiful a girl as your niece, Marcella Rust!"

"You take a great interest in him," she said slowly.

The financier smiled suddenly. "Yes—you see, Violet, I owe my new *role* as benefactor to the humble through you—you sent me an unwilling slave to hunt up the curate; now I am interested in him for his own sake—as you were for your young nephew, Edward Day. I have befriended him, and I shall now make it my duty to do the same by—by Philip Nullius."

Lady Violet opened her mouth to remind him that Edward Day was not her nephew—then stopped. After all, why go into a long discussion on that uninteresting young man, of whom she hoped to hear no more? If her new husband had forgotten the occasion when she had referred to him in her first letter, and also when Sir Cyprian had called to take Marcella back with him to the Court on the morning of her wedding to the financier——

"Tell me," she said suddenly, "are you going to Crawley soon, or will you wait? If you go, Caleb, you will see Marcella; you will find out why she does not write me—why there is such a long silence between us now!" She

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clasped her white hands round his arm, and gazed up into his face. "Caleb, you professed to love me when you brought me the news of my first husband's death! Has that love died now because I sent you away, or do you still care a little for me—enough to yet again do me a service?"

The financier looked at her with a grim smile on his mouth, and a strange expression flitted across his eyes—almost as though he had feared she would ask him a question he would rather not answer.

"I love you," he replied gravely, "probably more than I did when I told you about—about the death of your husband," and his mouth gave a queer, contorted little twist, "and whatever you want me to do you have only to command me, and I will do it."

"Then go to Crawley," she answered eagerly; "you are a man and can ask questions a woman cannot. See my brother-in-law, Sir Cyprian, and find out how he is treating Marcella—see her, if you can, and tell me how she looks—if she is ill or in any way wanting me. If I find out that that man has caused her any pain, I will not hesitate to retaliate—to strike at him in a way that will utterly ruin him."

Her eyes flashed and her colour came and went with the strength of suppressed passion.

"Caleb," and her fingers once again clutched her husband's, "you would always be very tender with me should my brother-in-law hint anything to you about my—my first husband—the days when I was first married, and—and was poor?"

He drew her to him with the old protecting gesture.

"If I hear that man say one word about you that I consider impertinent, I will make him eat his words, and thrash him within an inch of his life," he said slowly. "I will certainly go and find out how he is treating Marcella, and if I find her unhappy, she shall come away with me. She will be our daughter!"

Lady Violet's eyes flashed and her lips trembled. "Thank you, Caleb," she breathed softly; then raising her face to his, she said: "You may kiss me if you like." Very gravely and seriously the financier pressed a light kiss on her brow.

"I shall go and look up my secretary now," he said, after a pause; "then within a day or two shall go to Crawley. I shall see you again before I leave." He raised her hand to his lips and the next moment the door had closed gently behind the burly figure of the man of finance.

Lady Violet gazed after him wistfully. She did not quite understand the new Caleb J. Johnson. Something had changed him—had also aged him in a curiously sudden way, and his odd interest in Philip Nullius was almost absurd, if such a frivolous term could be used to describe any action of the financier.

She pressed her hands to her brow. Suppose Sir Cyprian refused to let him see Marcella, and in turn betrayed her secret to Caleb, her second husband, in the light that only her cruel, wicked brother-in-law could speak of!

What would happen then? she wondered feverishly—would Caleb believe it, or would he demand an explanation, and would that explanation mean a breach that would for ever stand between them? She shuddered.

Sir Cyprian Rust was a man who would strike as deeply as Caleb J. Johnson, when he opened his mouth, and his cunning would so weave the net of complicity round her that she would have no defence ready—no excuse save one of regret for the past folly that had made her barter flesh and blood for gold—to sell her peace of mind and self-respect for the life of ease and freedom from monetary distress.

She had done all that, gained the advantage of being able to pension off her incubus husband for so many years until death had rid her of him—but even that she would gladly have forfeited for the joy of having clasped in her arms the human price she had paid.

She flung herself into a chair, and murmured brokenly: "Oh, God! don't let him betray me—don't let me lose what I am trying to regain!"

FORTIETH CHAPTER.

A Face that Was Dead.

In the meantime the financier had jumped into a hansom and was being driven in the direction of the Park Lane residence, where he had installed Edward Day before leaving town.

He had given up his suite of rooms in the Dovermarle Hotel when he had been making anew his plans pending his marriage to Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, as he had anticipated her making his luxurious town house a resort of all Society, and a brilliant success. But all those hopes had fallen through.

Somehow his plans had not matured as he had hoped they would. His bride had refused to live with him, in fact very few people knew that he had been married; then there was the loss of his celebrated picture, the "Mona Lisa." In spite of that clue of the spade guinea, the police seemed to be still baffled by the mystery.

And of late his successes in the City had had one or two unexpected shocks. A prospectus had gone wrong owing to the sudden withdrawal of two most important directors; and, above all, while he had been away, he had read in the financial papers that his cherished Ruby Duncoran Mine was tottering in public favour; the mine he had taken such trouble to have prospected by one of the best mining engineers, had not caught on; and, lastly, the man Rayne, whom he had met so fatefully on the morning that he had learnt the real identity of the curate, Philip Nullius.

He had not kept his word so far to his old enemy; it had been impossible to send him money without revealing his identity as Caleb Jerningham, one and the same with the influential city magnate, Caleb J. Johnson.

But he would keep his word; he would go to the bank now, before seeing his secretary, young Day, and send banknotes to the value of the money he had taken from Rayne in their old days of comradeship, when they had worked side by side on the same claim. He raised the flap in the roof of the hansom, and directed the driver to go to the Bank of England.

When he arrived, and was folding the notes in his pocketbook, one of the clerks came up to him obsequiously—as the financier's big, loosely-knit figure was an object of awe and admiration to all those of his fellow-creatures who worshipped his wealth and power. "If you please, sir, would you kindly see Mr. Foster for a few moments? He is in his office."

"Oh, I am glad you have come down this morning, Mr. Johnson," said the head cashier, as the financier walked into his little den. "I was rather anxious to ask you about the signature of two cheques that have been honoured by us, but on looking more minutely into the signatures, I have noticed something a little odd—I wondered whether you had sprained your wrist, or whether you knew about them at all. They are each for £2,000."

The financier took the cheques in his hand, and one glance told him that they were forgeries. But who could have obtained access to his cheque-book, or have written his name so perfectly that even he was taken by surprise at first sight? At the sight of the name to whom they were made payable he started. It was J. Rayne!

"I am not sure," he said aloud. "I sign so many cheques in a week that it would not do to say off-hand that this is not my signature. I could swear to it in a way," he laughed, "and yet I am not certain—who cashed them?"

"A dark man, rather like a Colonial in appearance," was

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the careless reply. "He had very black hair and bright blue eyes, and his manner was most natural and easy, not as though he were afraid of being asked questions. Of course we will put it into the hands of the police, Mr. Johnson," he said eagerly.

"Ah, I should like to have these cheques for a day or two," the financier replied. "When I call again I will know how I intend to proceed, should my suspicions be correct."

As he was being driven homeward to Park Lane, Caleb J. Johnson bit his lip once or twice, and a savage gleam shot from his eyes.

On entering the large imposing mansion that seldom saw its master, he went straight to his study, and, flinging open the door, walked in.

Seated at the desk was Edward Day; he was bending over some papers, and was so intent on what he was doing, that it was not until the financier's large brown hand touched him on the shoulder that he looked up.

When he saw who it was his pale face flushed suddenly, and from his blue eyes that of late had grown hollow and bloodshot, flashed a glance of startled recognition and fear. But he pulled himself together and rose to his feet with a smile of welcome.

"Good morning, sir," he said in his well-bred tones; "your arrival is somewhat unexpected, isn't it? I thought I should hear from you."

The financier nodded curtly. "Yes, I always come and go at my pleasure. By-the-way, I want to see that cheque-book you have of mine, Day," he said suddenly, keeping his eyes fixed on his secretary's face, from which the colour slowly ebbed. "I left it in one of the drawers of that desk."

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Johnson," Edward said slowly. "I have seen no cheque-book—only notes and things are here, sir." He pointed to a roll of notes that rested on top of some papers in an open drawer.

The financier smiled grimly. "Yes, I wonder you did not use them," he remarked drily. "But there were probably not enough; you were ambitious, and wanted more than a few hundreds! But it was foolish to sign away two cheques within so short a time of each other for the same amount," he continued sarcastically; "you are a promising rogue, Mr. Day, and it will give me much pleasure to see you in the hands of those authorities who undertake to correct perverted ideas concerning other people's property.

"Come, don't dare to bluff it over me, you contemptible young cur!" he rapped sharply, seeing his secretary about to speak. "I've not knocked about the world without being able to read guilt on a face before now. I trusted you—I treated you with confidence, you unutterable young scoundrel, but I shall take good care to prevent you from continuing your brief career as a successful swindler and forger! By to-night you will be lodging in Bow Street, and I shall not be the only person to rejoice at your fate." He went to the bell, but before he could touch it a hoarse laugh broke from his secretary.

"Stop! In another moment you will regret having rung that bell more than any other incident in your life."

Mr. Johnson looked at him coldly. "What do you mean?" he said slowly. "Am I the type of man you imagine can be played upon by threats? You have mistaken your man, Mr. Edward Day. I have not the slightest intention of listening to anything you may have to say for yourself. I am a hard man, and don't intend to unbend to save the pride of such a promising young scamp as yourself."

"No, I have not the slightest idea that I could make you do anything for my sake, sir," panted his secretary, leaning across the table, a curiously ugly smile on his lips; "but I fancy you would sacrifice a great deal for yourself—even the joy of a petty retaliation."

"What do you mean?" The financier's voice sounded crisp and metallic. His hand had slipped from the bell and hung limply by his side, but his eyes never left the white face of the man who had spoken with so odd a note of triumph in his speech.

"Mean?" Edward Day laughed loudly. "Why, that it

The Unemployed.

The two words at the head of this article form what printers call a standing line. Never a winter passes without this melancholy title for a record of want and suffering appearing daily in our journals. It is a pitiable thing, an evil that the wisest statesmen and the richest and most generous philanthropists at their best seem only able to alleviate. To discover a complete remedy for the trouble passes the wit of man, and whoever looks forward to a period when there shall be profitable work always ready for the hand of he who is willing to labour is regarded as a dreamer.

But in our country there is a second vast army of unemployed whose sufferings are never discussed in the newspapers, viz., the thousands who have work to do and are anxious to do it, but who are kept away from office or workshop by ill-health. The amount of work (and therefore of money) lost in this way each year is incalculable. Nevertheless, it is an evil which might in large measure be prevented, for Mother Seigel's Syrup cures indigestion, a cause of immense suffering and loss, as well as a forerunner of many other complaints.

"About two years ago," writes Mr. David J. Thomas, of Central House, Drefach-Llandyssil, Carmarthenshire, September 30th, 1903, "my appetite failed, and I became incapable of work. A dull pain at the stomach, particularly after eating, greatly troubled me. Though I was extremely careful as to what I ate, this symptom gradually grew worse until I was never free from it. I was troubled, too, with wind and dizziness, which sometimes caused me to stagger about. Although very ill, I so far contrived to work through it all. A doctor here prescribed some medicine for me, but it did not touch my complaint, and I was not a bit the better for it. After that another doctor near Carmarthen attended me, with the same result.

"After enduring this misery for about six months, and seeing no chance of recovery under the treatment I was receiving, I one day happily thought of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. I had often heard it spoken of favourably, and resolved to obtain a bottle of it. I had not taken much of the medicine before I discovered that it was benefiting me considerably. My appetite and strength increased daily. All the pain and dizziness left me, and in five weeks I was well and strong again, able to work with pleasure."

To be able to work with pleasure is a sure sign of health, and people in that happy condition are always the last to be numbered among the unemployed

A Victim of Fads.

Recently there died in Bradford a clothworker who was much troubled by indigestion, though not more so than many thousands of people who find their cure in Mother Seigel's Syrup. To obtain relief, he adopted a plan of life the severity of which would have frightened a twelfth century monk. He became a teetotaler, non-smoker, and vegetarian, besides being *anti* so many things that this column is too short to chronicle them in. But his heroic self-denial availed him nothing, and he died—aged thirty! Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup could have saved him. It is the only sure cure for indigestion and biliousness. Being compounded of fruits, roots and herbs, it causes food to nourish naturally, and is an unequalled digestive.

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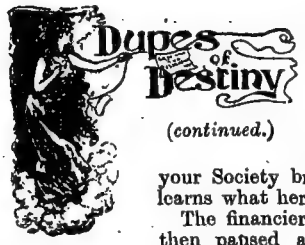

(continued.)

will be foreign to your usual cleverness to prosecute me for a paltry few thousands, when I can make you sing very small in return by mentioning what I know about you, Mr. Johnson! Lady Violet, your Society bride, will feel proud when she learns what her husband is."

The financier took a step towards him, then paused and laughed; but his laugh was forced, and the large, capable-looking hand was tightly clenched.

"You speak in riddles," he said scornfully. "What do you, a penniless youth, know about me? You had better be careful, Mr. Day; you may find the crime of blackmail laid to you with the one of forgery."

Edward laughed. "I fancy you won't do that. It won't be worth your while to prosecute a penniless youth, and at the same time acquaint the world with the fact that you deserted your first wife and bought off Lady Violet's first husband at a price, thereby making her a bigamist; that is a serious charge in itself, Mr.—Jerningham."

The financier fell back as though he had been shot. His face had faded to a sickly green, and his eyes flashed ominously. "You young scoundrel!" he said between his teeth. "It was an ill day for me when I let you enter my house! So you have been prying and nosing into what is no business of yours? You have spent your time worthily! I feel a deep regret that you have no parents to take a joy in such a son; you would be a shining light to any home."

"Oh, it's all very well to sneer," Edward said carelessly; "but anyway I think you will agree with me that you had better drop the question of those cheques, and I in turn will do my best to forget that I hold any little secrets of yours, Mr. Jerningham."

"You cur!" the financier exclaimed hoarsely. "Don't let me hear that name again. It has nothing to do with guilt, but I dropped it for financial purposes."

"Yes, and to avoid being traced by Mrs. Jerningham, eh?" his secretary sneered lightly. "Did you also buy off Major Frayne-Lennox for financial purposes?"

An ugly, baffled expression shot from Caleb J. Johnson's eyes—a look that spelt murder as it was committed in the days of his youth in Australia.

"Be silent, you unlicked cub—do you hear! If I consent to be quiet on this matter, it is only because I wish to shield your aunt—not because I fear what your petty spite can do. By-the-way," he went on sharply, "you made those cheques payable to—to a man called Rayne—what were they in payment for? What dirty secret does he hold of yours?"

The chance shot went home. Edward Day's face grew suddenly livid, and a haggard, hunted look stole into his eyes.

"Secret? No secret!" he muttered harshly. "What do you mean? Do you—do you——" his voice trailed off into a whisper.

Then it was that an inspiration came to Caleb J. Johnson. He turned slowly, and said with assumption of carelessness: "That girl, the one with the yellow hair—do you treat her well, or have you deserted her?"

Edward Day bit his trembling nether lip, and glared savagely at the man who had regained his coolness in spite of the threat he held over his head. "She is no concern of yours," he retorted savagely, though he wondered what had occasioned the question. He had hoped that no one had ever seen him with the girl—the girl whom he knew he would never see again. Yet Caleb J. Johnson had evidently met them somewhere.

"No," said the financier slowly, "your love affairs are less than nothing to me, Mr. Day. But that is not the question we are discussing. For holding my tongue about your business you expect what?"

Edward looked at him slyly. "That you honour those two cheques and give me another for five thousand!" he said coolly; "otherwise I shall certainly lose nothing by going to Lady Violet, and acquainting her with the fact that you bought a cheque from an old Army man who had threatened disgrace to her first husband. Oh," he sneered, "you are very clever, Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, but I fancy I have the upper hand in spite of your brains!"

"I shall ignore those two cheques you forged," the financier said slowly, "and give you another for one thousand; but not a penny more, d'you hear? You may blackmail as much as you like, but I will put the whole thing in the hands of the police if I have any further trouble with you. Here's the cheque for the thousand," he went on, scribbling on a blank form torn from his cheque book, "and another five hundred for your salary. Now leave my house and my sight for ever!" he snarled savagely. "I won't have you in it five minutes longer!"

Edward saw that to stay and argue with the man with that iron jaw was worse than useless; besides he feared to risk too much by forcing his hand. The money he had would keep him on his feet until he had come into that undiscovered fortune which he felt was his by right.

He was slowly making inquiries, and hoped soon to be a step nearer the great truth—the truth that would give him a father's name and position. Then he would turn over a new leaf, and live a quiet, retiring life for a time—until he could forget what he had been fighting to forget for so long.

He turned on his heel and left the room, after closely examining the two cheques flung at him by the financier, who stood regarding him with a curiously intent gaze.

As he closed the door gently he laughed softly. "Old Moneybags had to pay up more than he liked, anyway. It was rather a surprise for him to discover that anyone knew of his double life, and my lovely aunt is utterly unconscious that she has been made a bigamist by her millionaire husband."

A slow smile of wicked cunning stole upon his face. "By Jove!—that's an idea! It will bring her to her senses and get my own back at the same time."

He went up to his desk and sat down. Suddenly a slight movement caused him to look up. Was it fancy, or did a shadow really fall across his letter? He started to his feet, and glanced with a livid face at the window. Who had been looking in at him?

What pale face and staring eyes were those that, shrouded in a cloud of wet, yellow hair seemed to gaze in upon him, then vanish? With a half inarticulate cry he picked up the ink bottle and flung it with all his strength at the window. "You fiend, keep away!" he muttered; "keep away!"

The sound of falling glass brought a servant into the room.

"It's all right, Simmons," he said with an awkward laugh, "I fell against the table."

The man looked at him, then retired softly, and presently the secretary left the house.

In the meantime Caleb J. Johnson was sitting with his head in his hands in the room where Edward Day had left him. "Oh, God!" he groaned, "I am not much of a praying man—my life has been too busy for that—but I thank Thee that my son is not as this young scoundrel is. At least Destiny has made a good man of him."

(Another grand instalment of this serial next week.)

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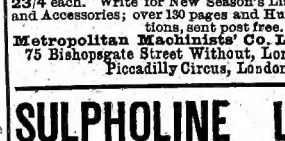

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

A Foolish Objection.

How very silly of your parents, "VIOLET," to expect you to cease meeting the young man simply because he is five years older than yourself! That is quite an ideal difference in ages, and I cannot understand their objection.

Etiquette of Engagements.

THE task of announcing your engagement to friends at a distance, "K. E. T.," should fall on your mother. You, of course, will tell your own particular friends of the matter whenever you like, and a formal note would not be necessary to them, if they are within calling distance. In the case of a man, it doesn't matter how the happy news gets round. He breaks it or not to his friends as he thinks fit.

* * * * *

Now, as to the other question you ask me. It *is* usual for a girl to go and spend a little time with her *fiancé's* parents, so that they may become fully acquainted with each other before the wedding. No doubt you will receive some such invitation very soon. It is not usual, by-the-way, for the young man himself to be at home while you are paying this visit to his parents. Of course, if he lives at home, it is different. But, if he does not, the etiquette is for you to spend a little time alone in the society of his parents.

How Quarrels Breed.

"MAY BLOSSOM" tells me of an affair which shows how easily a little tiff grows into an estrangement, if not carefully watched. She used to walk out a great deal with a young man, but they were not engaged. Once he met her in the street while she was talking to another man. Next time they met he passed her by in a very cool manner. "MAY BLOSSOM" was offended, and, just to show it, she went out with the other young man just as often as she felt inclined.

* * * * *

Young man No. 1 saw her frequently, and to show his own feelings he, too, took up with somebody else. Whenever the two met, therefore, they saw each other with different companions. Yet all the time each of them felt an "aching void," and wished to get back again to each other, and have done with the sham. Well, it turned out that the sham sweethearts soon parted, and once more the two were free to resume their friendship. But the young man won't speak to "MAY BLOSSOM" now, and she doesn't care to raise the question herself. What is she to do?

* * * * *

From what you say, it seems that the young man himself rather wants the quarrel to blow over. Of course, in a way, he began it by being cool to you without reason. But it was your own fault that the quarrel grew serious, as you evidently went out of your way to tease him. Why not make amends now as you were the first to start the game of bluff?

Billiards and Love.

"MY sweetheart spends a lot of his time playing billiards," writes "AMY." "Do you think this is right? Should I, as his future wife, ask him to give it up?"

* * * * *

There is nothing wrong in billiards by itself, "AMY." If your sweetheart's playing brings him into contact with bad companions, and results in his spending a lot of money, and giving way to such things as drink and gambling, then you might have something to say about it. But you could scarcely object to his playing billiards, which is, after all, one of the best of games from the mental point of view.

A Mixed Affair.

"I AM very friendly with two young ladies," writes "BOYSIE," "one of whom goes out with me, the other with a friend of mine. The girl who goes with my friend seems to have taken a fancy to me and *vice versâ*. I like both girls equally, but my friend prefers my girl. What is the best course to pursue? One is plump and skittish, the other slim and proper."

* * * * *

It seems that if your friend prefers your girl, and his girl prefers you, you might make an exchange for the benefit of all parties. As you yourself like both girls equally, the odds should be in favour of the girl who likes you best. Make friends with the latter, and allow your friend his own choice, and all should be in order.

The Backward Young Man.

"R. T." Your previous letter did not reach me. am sorry you suffer so much from shyness and backwardness. It is a good idea to have joined the Christian Association you speak of. But the fact that you do not know any of the girls there, and have no one to introduce you, should not discourage you. It would not be right to join such a society with the sole object of meeting young ladies, as seems to be your idea. You should take an active part in whatever functions are going on, and you would very soon get to know girls in that way. To look upon an association of that kind just as a meeting place is not a right view, and I am not surprised that you have so far failed to make acquaintances. There would be no harm in your speaking to a young lady there, if you had proper reason to do so, or were taking part in the same function.

A Girl with a Distinguished Name.

"I COME of a noble family," writes "EDITH," "and bear a name that is very distinguished indeed. Now, is it not hard on me in marrying, that my future husband's name is a very common one? All through my life I have been respected as a member of a great family, and now I am to be one of a hundred thousand others. I suppose, though, there is no help for it?"

* * * * *

I am afraid you could only retain your maiden name by becoming a professional celebrity, or by living in Portugal—the only country where such is the custom. To your neighbours and tradesmen you will have to be plain Mrs. (whatever your common name may be), and, when one comes to think of it, if a man's fortune is good enough for a girl to share, his name ought also to be good enough. As a final resort, there would be no harm in "EDITH'S" adding her own name to that of her husband, and making a double-barrelled affair of it. That is often done, but I rather fancy that a Mrs. Shakespeare-Smythe would be charged more for her meat by the butcher than plain Mrs. Smith. One has to live up to a big name.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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Constipation

If I were asked to specify THE disease or ailment of the day, I should unhesitatingly answer—"CONSTIPATION."

SO says one of the greatest medical writers of the present day, and he follows this statement by saying that women are the commonest sufferers. Undoubtedly he is right! Just imagine a town with every drain stopped. Would you be surprised to find pestilence and fever abound? Hardly! Where constipation exists, the drains which nature has provided to clear the body of its impurities are out of order, and the impurities are left in the body. The result is that every organ of the body is rendered foul. The liver and digestive organs become clogged and unable to fulfil their functions, the appetite is destroyed, the head either aches or feels dull and heavy, there is heat and feverishness, a dreary don't-care-about-anything feeling, a sensation of irritability with everybody and everything. Sometimes, also, constipation brings on piles. Now, if you have any of these symptoms, remember that constipation is their root cause. Remember, also, that the root cure for constipation, and indirectly for all these symptoms, is the vegetable essence concentrated in Bile Beans for Biliousness. So effective are Bile Beans for this ailment, that in several cases where constipation has been so neglected that it has resulted in stoppage of the bowels, they have, nevertheless, brought about a complete cure. A case of this kind, which occurred a short time back in Birmingham, may be quoted.

Miss Ettie Palmer.
(*From a photo.*)

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At back 253 Gt. Colmore Street, in that city, lives Miss Ettie Palmer. She is now a healthy young woman—thanks to Bile Beans—but she wasn't always. This very ailment, constipation, seized upon her, and its ravages are well illustrated in her case. She says:

"In my case, acute constipation led to stoppage of the bowels. I could not take nourishment, and consequently grew too feeble to work. Having taken to my bed I got weaker and weaker. It was not thought I should live. Indeed, the clergyman of the parish came to pray at my bedside, so near death was I.

"The doctor called in a physician, and it was said my only hope of life lay in an operation, which might or might not be successful. I was taken to the Queen's Hospital, and prepared for operation, but at the last moment my parents stopped all the proceedings and had me taken back home.

"This was in consequence of what they had heard about the power of Bile Beans, and I started upon a course immediately. From the first I improved, and in a few days my bowels were acting normally. I gradually got stronger, and in a short time was back at work. Since then I have worked for twelve months, and have never had a trace of my old complaint. I was so weak at the time I was taken to hospital for the operation that I believe I should never have survived it."

THE MEDICINE FOR THE MILLION.

BILE BEANS FOR BILIOUSNESS

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